LOCATING THE NATIVE ARTIST: MEMORY AND TRANSFORMATION IN CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS

by

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B.A., Art History, University of Arizona, 2000
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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
Art History

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Albuquerque, New Mexico

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DEDICATION

For Tisha Romero and Estelle Neztsosie Ketchum, *in memoriam*

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ABSTRACT

The reception and understanding of visual arts made by contemporary Native American artists has been shaped by Euro-American modernist conceptions of the Indian which images them as the unstable form for the contestation of, and comparison to, Western man. This historical process defines Native people today by their presumed absence (or invisibility) and, conversely, defines their presence as the "Other." Therefore, an examination of theories and methods composing Indian identity will be considered, within historical dimensions, to reveal how issues of identity are implicitly linked to a metaphysical "self/other" problem that privileges difference over responsibility. The approach consists of excavating the historical past for the conceiving of alternatives to concomitant issues and postmodern theoretical trends impacting Native American art historical discourse today.

As a form of resistance, contemporary Native artists are engaged in reconstructing cultural memory to transgress limits imposed on them by a discourse exclusively tied to the European condition and its historical situations. In particular, the work of Diego

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Romero and Edgar Heap of Birds will be utilized to show how the politics of difference have been woven into the field of art history and, subsequently, manifested in writings that concern itself with visual art made by contemporary Native American artists. In other words, the various processes Native artists are employing to locate themselves in a contemporary context, as participants in the permanent critique of the present, will correlate with an exploration of mainstream theoretical accounts that have historically dislocated Native artists to the margins of the art world.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> The deep impression made upon American minds by the Indian struggle against the white man in the last century has made the contemporary Indian somewhat invisible compared with his ancestors. Today Indians are not conspicuous by their absence from view. Yet they should be.
>
> Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969)

> That indigenous worldviews have survived despite centuries of enforced cession testify to the power of the local to embrace cultural difference and contradiction without relinquishing fundamentally sustainable concepts, presenting a fertile ground for developing new artistic and intellectual models of resistance to globalizing forces of homogenization and commodification.
>
> Jean Fisher, *New Contact Zones: A Reflection* (2006)

In *I and Thou*, German philosopher Martin Buber's seminal book on social change addressed the centrality of human relationships to diagnose certain tendencies in modern society by describing man's relationships to other men through the theme of alienation.[1] By pluralizing the many modes of the "I-You" relationship (the human I and the human you), Buber conceptualized this dualism and presented an ethical challenge that resonates, even to this day, by focusing upon a comprehension of the world in its multiplicities. In a more recent study that pursues the politics of identity, political

[1] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), p. 18. Buber's original essay *Ich und Du* (later *I and Thou*) was originally published in 1923.

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scientist William E. Connolly explores the relational and constructed character of identity from a perspective that discerns the effects of elements of power that unceasingly make a difference to the ethical quality of political and, hence, social life in the US and abroad.[2] Much like Buber, Connolly traces the historical problem of identity and difference to the roots of human nature, experience, and existence to explain how paradigms that maintain hegemonic, ideological structures function in the U.S. as an idealization of politics. Their distinct approaches relate the inevitability of the politics of identity to create social and conceptual spaces that impinge upon each other by considering the way individuals and collectivities experience identities invested in them.[3] Identities that must define what deviates from them as intrinsically evil (or one of its modern surrogates), in order to establish their own self-certainty, are defined as paradigm instances to counter and contest.

As part of an ongoing postcolonial revisionist effort, the Native point of view has often taken a sustained adversarial stance against fixed ideas of settled identities and culturally authorized definitions imposed by the "West." In fact, for most contemporary Native American artists, the reconstruction of cultural memory, in the form of images in some recent works, reflects an urgency to transgress mainstream historical accounts that image the Indian as an unstable form for the contestation of, and comparison to, Western man.[4] This misrepresentation of Native identity, conceptualized and characterized by the

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[2] William E. Connolly, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. ix.
[3] Ibid., p. 160.
[4] In *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), scholar Bernard McGrane traces the development of authoritative paradigms for interpreting and explaining the difference of the Other as it goes through mutations beginning with the Renaissance when Christianity

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multiple levels of (mis)understandings inherent to the epistemological status of the non-European Other, has shaped the reception and understanding of visual arts made by contemporary Native artists.[5] According to Native American scholar Gerald Vizenor, this historical process has produced mainstream conceptions of the history of the Indian as an aesthetic sacrifice whose absence, or cultural invisibility, became a perverse presence known as the Other in the form of a commodity.[6] Additionally, Vizenor believes that Native people today are best known through their fugitive poses "as textual and graphic articulations of romantic victimry [*sic*], tragedy, and nostalgia by a modernist aesthetic whose objectivizing view is both oppressive and a prison of false identities."[7]

To elucidate what Vizenor refers to as the "aesthetic sacrifice" imposed by modernist discourse, an exploration of the underlying concepts informing this discourse will reveal dominant dialogues linking the disciplines of anthropology and history to theoretical structures fundamentally informed by an aesthetics of diversity inextricably bound by Western practices of art and culture collecting. An examination of theories and methods composing Indian identity will be considered, within historical dimensions, to reveal how issues of identity are implicitly linked to a metaphysical "self/other" problem

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came between the European and the Other; the Enlightenment, when Ignorance came between the European and the Other; the nineteenth century, when developmental time lodged itself between the European and the Other; and the early twentieth century, when "Culture" accounts for the difference of the Other.

[5] Janet Catherine Berlo, ed., *The Early Years of Native American Art History: The Politics of Scholarship and Collecting* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1992), pp. 1-21. According to Berlo, at the turn of the century scholarly writings on Native art were devoted solely to classificatory or descriptive information at the expense of essays that might have been concerned with modern ideas, methods, or theory. Berlo demonstrates how the history of institutional collecting has constructed what comprises, to most people, Indian art today as a field based in studies of evolution in technique and the development of technological skills.

[6] Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 27.

[7] Ibid., p. 22.

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that privileges difference over responsibility. In particular, this study will begin with a critique of anthropological narratives whose reflections on Indians constitute a disciplinary position that has had a cumulative effect on artists, communities, and the general discourse framing contemporary Native American art. The challenge involves interrogating a type of decentered, mythical American consciousness that images American Indian social existence as "otherness" because of historical constructions of knowledge concerning nation, race, and ethnicity. In fact, it is nationalism, whether resurgent or new, that fastens on narratives for structuring, assimilating, or excluding one or another version of history.[8] Consequently, it is with the unfolding of nineteenth-century colonialism in America, along with the growth of an anthropology in the service of imperial power, that nationalism adopts primordial bonds to modern complexities.[9]

Anthropology and the "Idea of Culture"[10]

In an era that Foucault observed philosophy to have dissembled into anthropology, the late-nineteenth century witnessed the formation of what was to become the beginning of a history of Native American art based on the collective and cultural interests of U.S. institutions. In fact, the second half of the nineteenth-century and the first decade of the twentieth formed the great era of collecting when scholars, scientists, and entrepreneurs acquired and arranged objects to represent their idea of Native

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[8] Edward W. Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 1989, p. 221.
[9] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 26.
[10] This analysis of Eagleton's idea of culture draws from my essay "Native American Cosmopolitan Modernism(s): A Re-articulation of Presence Through Time and Space," *Third Text*, Vol. 19, Issue 4, July, 2005, pp. 357-364.

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American culture.[11] This idea subjected American Indians to assumptions about tradition, history, and authenticity shaped by oppressive dichotomies informing Western taxonomy, memory, and consciousness. Subsequently, when Native America's relationship to modernism is usually defined, the ensuing discussion reveals a privileged, anthropological understanding of history exemplified by the ideological complex known variously as the salvage paradigm. As this paradigm relates to conceptions of time and space, James Clifford points out that nineteenth-century evolutionism ordered the world's societies into a linear sequence constructed by endless imaginary redemptions that functioned aesthetically to preserve an "authentic" past.[12] As expected, non-western groups in the Americas occupied the lower levels of the evolutionary ladder in a special status called the "ethnographic present" when, in fact, it was actually the past. This convenient historical scenario had "progression" as its measuring stick until twentieth century relativist anthropology was faced with redistributing human difference into separate groups known as "cultures."[13]

As it were, the idea of culture began for the Native American as a tribal construct, rather than as a decidedly cosmopolitan one.[14] This complex relationship is described by

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[11] For example, the Smithsonian Institution was established in 1846, the Peabody Museum at Harvard in 1856, New York's American Museum of Natural History in 1869, the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1879, and so forth (Berlo, op cit., pp. 1-5).

[12] James Clifford, "The Others: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm" in Araeen, Cubitt, Sardar, eds., *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture, and Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 160-61.

[13] The word "culture" is supposed to designate a kind of society but it is in fact a normative way of imagining that society. Furthermore, Eagleton explains that it can also be a way of imagining one's own social conditions on the model of other people's, either in the past, the bush, or the political future (Eagleton, op cit., p. 25).

[14] This dichotomy between Western and tribal refers to the symbolic dominance of economic activity as a European, or Euro-American, marker for production. For scholars that subscribe to this view, changes in economic activity signal changes in the structures of meaning, i.e., economy as the prime mover in historical processes. See Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, ed., *Culture Through Time: Anthropological Approaches*

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Eagleton, when discussing the cultural milieu at the end of the nineteenth-century, as a period in which the word "civilization" had acquired an inescapable imperialist echo, so another word was needed to denote how social life should be, rather than how it was.[15] That word happened to be "culture," the opposite of "civility," which was used to describe the life-forms of "savages" as a primitive social order known as the Indian.[16] This juxtaposition of the "cultured" and "civilized" served to reify all perceived differences in a process that distanced Euro-American identity from the Indian to, in effect, "other" the Indian. Apparently, the savages had culture whereas the civilized, presumably, did not.[17] Thus, Eagleton discusses the construction of the image of the savage, or Indian, in terms of a "life-form" as counterpoint to the existing nature of the ever-increasing Euro-American population.

Unfortunately, for the Native American, this paradigm engendered levels of exploitation to serve the ideological, as well as economic, purposes occasioned by colonialism with the yielding of an aestheticized primitiveness imposed by the West. This Romantic version of culture "as a way of life" functioned as an aestheticized version of society where the savages could be grasped in the round like artifacts floating

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(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 12-13.

[15] In this time period, the word "culture" identified a Romantic, pre-Marxist critique of early industrial capitalism because actual civilization appeared predatory and debased. The concept of "culture" thus prefigures the West's later idealizing of the "primitive," which is closely bound up with a Romantic anticolonialist penchant for suppressed "exotic" societies, in a critique that was, in fact, a normative way of imagining a utopian society (Eagleton, op cit. , p. 10).

[16] In *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), pp. 9-25, Aimé Césaire points out that the chief culprit in European colonization around the world has been the "domain of Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations *Christianity=civilization, paganism=savagery*, from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the yellow peoples and the Negroes."

[17] It is unlikely that the Victorians thought of themselves as a "culture"; this would not only have meant seeing themselves in the round, but seeing themselves as just one possible life-form among many (Eagleton, op cit., p. 13).

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ambiguously between fact and value, with an integrity of being lacking to those who stand outside it.[18] These modes of Romantic organicism were then recast into a scientific, anthropological functionalism in a move that had particular importance for cultural modernism because the "West" saw itself meeting up with the archaic to become regenerated, or refreshed, at the fountain of culture.[19] Since Indians were seen as residues of the past within the present, their perceived ethnic peculiarities resulted in the transference to American society values linked aesthetically to artifacts emblematic of unity, sensuous immediacy, and freedom from conflict. Furthermore, tradition and modernity could be conveniently harmonized since Euro-American modernism put time into reverse gear and found in the past an image of its own future by envisioning a mythical, American national character that, ironically enough, cut above and below social life.

For that reason, "culture" as the principle of social unity became significant only when it became a force to be reckoned with politically. The impetus behind the modern alienation of the social from everyday existence (economic, moral, or intellectual) was the creation of a new kind of Euro-American society that relied upon notions of culture to speak eloquently of their own society at the expense of tribal peoples. The anthropological idea of a distinct ethnic culture, or unique way of life, came to prominence when, in the nineteenth-century, colonialism marked the point where the pre-modern nation gave way to the modern nation-state. For Eagleton, this condition points to the failure of the "West" to achieve "actual civilization"—a grand narrative of

[18] Ibid., p. 27.
[19] Ibid., pp. 27-29.

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progressive human self-development carried over from the Enlightenment—at a time when modern Euro-American society found itself in the throes of radical and painful changes.[20] However, and rightly so, Eagleton also points out:

> . . . somewhat later, it will be part of the task of anthropology to conspire in the massive perceptual illusion through which a nascent imperialism brought 'savages' into being, freezing them conceptually in their sub-human otherness even as it disrupted their social formations and liquidated them physically.[21]

For scholar Edward Said, these cultural constructions describe a condition fundamentally central to the historical problem of European modernism's inability to comprehend the Other in terms that are non-identitarian in thought, or else dependent upon abstract and groundless concepts like "otherness" and "difference," because of the process of empire.[22] Additionally, it points to the praxis of anthropology as representative of "outside" power; not as textuality, but as a direct agent of political dominance with important philosophical processes at work in the production as well as the acquisition, subordination, and settlement of spaces.[23] In fact, comprehending the discrepancies between one's relationships with others means apprehending the imperial contest itself as a cultural fact of extraordinary political as well as interpretive importance.

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[20] Ibid., p. 20. Moreover, Eagleton goes further in his analysis to point out that the "savage mind" had particular importance for cultural modernism (from T.S. Eliot's fertility cults to Stravinsky's rites of spring) because it could produce a shadowy critique of Enlightenment rationality. In a way, a person could have their theoretical cake and eat it, too, by finding in "primitive" cultures both a critique of such rationality and a confirmation of it.
[21] Ibid., p. 27, Eagleton quoting Jairus Banaji, "The Crisis of British Anthropology," *New Left Review*, No. 64, November/December, 1970.
[22] Said, op cit., p. 217.
[23] Ibid.

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That scholars in both disciplines (history and anthropology) choose the cultural other as their object of investigation also recalls Lévi-Strauss' dynamic that it is ultimately an exercise in the reflexive examination of the self; a quest for the self through the study of the other.[24] What's more, Fanon analyzed these constructs and determined that a necessary part of colonialism is the process whereby "the colonizers problematize the culture and the very being of the colonized"[25] so that, on the one hand, the "native" is completely denigrated and, on the other hand, is absolutely necessary to maintaining the superiority of the settler. In *White Man's Indian*, Berkhofer points out that such a negative reference group could be used to define White identity or to prove White superiority over the worst fears of their own depravity.[26] The results of this point to a history of White Indian imagery structured by Europeans and Americans alike using counterimages of themselves to describe Indians and counterimages of Indians to describe themselves.[27]

Re-thinking Native American Modernism

For scholars such as anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, the beginning of a new era for anthropology has emerged to challenge such dominant paradigms in an expression that reflects the overall general crisis in contemporary academia.[28] This structural change is credited to a new type of historicized anthropology that gives way to

[24] Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, op cit., p. 2.
[25] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 47.
[26] Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), pp. 25-27.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, op cit., p. 1.

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epistemologies of all textures and degrees, particularly the postcolonial and postscientist, to incorporate social and historical dimensions into anthropological research. According to Ohnuki-Tierney, previous negation of historical methods was due primarily to a colonial *mentalité* inspired by Eurocentric beliefs that so-called nonliterate peoples did not have historical and intellectual traditions of their own.[29] In fact, scholars now realize that they must confront histories from both a reflective and subjunctive mode instead of the usual descriptive and conditional methods that solely modeled the field in the past. Similarly, for the past thirty years, the field of art history has shifted its focus away from previously held assumptions that art somehow represents the embodiment or concretization of basic values and fundamental truths that exist somewhere outside of history, beyond social mutation, and external to political and economic reality.[30]

As a form of resistance, post-colonial critiques of modernism have done much to further studies into culture theory by engaging a critique of origins to destabilize hegemonic ideologies that maintain white intellectual supremacy over the academic field of art history.[31] In fact, as scholar Kenneth Coutts-Smith pointed out in his seminal essay of 1978, the problematic notion of the extra-historicity of art that has been anchored by Eurocentric ideas of culture should be described as nothing less than cultural

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[29] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[30] Kenneth Coutts-Smith, "Cultural Colonialism" in *Third Text*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, 2002, p. 2. Article originally published in *Black Phoenix*, No. 2, Summer 1978 (forerunner of *Third Text*).

[31] This type of critique is similar to a *postmodernism of resistance* whose aims are to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo. Its opposition exists in a *postmodernism of reaction* which repudiates modernism but affirms the status quo by blaming the practices of modernism for the ills of modernization in ways that still sever the cultural from the social (i.e. a return to tradition) (Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. xii).

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colonialism.[32] The proliferation of thinkers who observed this paradigm shift were, in large part, signaled by the discipline of cultural studies whose questioning of the aesthetic meant contending with literary[33] and artistic bodies of knowledge containing epistemic[34] roots nourished by an abstract formation of ideas encompassing Art, Truth, and Beauty[35] (as a totality) on a continuum that divorced all remnants of the social and political in its dynamics (especially those of outside cultures). In this case, the main contrasts to be considered are those that have eluded even the most recent advances made by the post-colonial re-thinking of Native American modernism. Those structures to be re-examined relate to the production of inherited art forms as neither "authentic" nor "inauthentic," or "traditional" and "nontraditional," but rather as a discursive field in its own right that has been continuously plagued by the idea of culture.

The approach consists of excavating the historical past for the conceiving of alternatives to concomitant issues and postmodern theoretical trends impacting art historical discourse today. As a term that is at once difficult to define and embrace,

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[32] Coutts-Smith's essay directly addresses and critiques the discipline of aesthetics as a "complex of ideas that is clustered around the interrelated notions of the essential spirituality of art, the sublimity of the creative experience, and the passion of genius" (Ibid., p. 1).

[33] The practice of writing (and rewriting) literary history expanded across disciplines, in the form of "theory," in areas such as art history, philosophy, and politics, to only name a few. Most theorists allied themselves with literary studies in their procedure or in their audiences (Ibid.). It is a method of interrogating art history that informs, to a large extent, the present text.

[34] Epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge and justification; specifically, the study of the defining features, the substantive conditions or sources, and the limits of knowledge and justification. The aims of this paper are to explore the nature of all three of these categories because they are representational of the traditional philosophical controversy over the analysis of knowledge, whose viability comes into question because of skepticism about theories knowledge and its justifications (Paul K. Moser, in Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 273).

[35] This characterization extends primarily from a Eurocentric, or homogenous, system of thought inherent in early assumptions made in the field of aesthetics that urge the separation of the aesthetic from the cultural and social (often championing values that make the aesthetic comparable with moral, epistemic, and religious values) (Susan L. Feagin, in Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 11-13).

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postmodern[36] debates center on whether or not there is a sharp conceptual distinction between modernism and postmodernism and the relative merits and limitations of these movements.[37] Since aesthetics and politics are, inevitably, juxtaposed, postmodern conceptualizations range across academic disciplines, diverse in their own methodologies both culturally and intellectually, to create philosophical divides between Left and Right thinkers.[38] However, in general, postmodern theoretical accounts are critical of traditional notions of aesthetic thought and often run counter to Enlightenment universalism and foundationalism to allow room for diversity in artistic expression to be noticed and understood.[39]

This transformative process is focused on using culture as a critique of the present[40] (while being based solidly within it) to move both with and against the grain of

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[36] Articulating the "postmodern" is, generally speaking, an exploration of recent criticism's problems with history. To read contemporary criticism (including art criticism) means recognizing the interrelations of at least three layers: the romantic metaphysics of symbol and imagination, the Victorian stance of disinterested, yet worldly, discrimination, and, finally, modernist, technical specifications of professional critical tasks. The most thorough, postmodern criticisms deal with the passages between the modern and postmodern because, after all, history itself is a construct (Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 2-3).

[37] Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, eds., *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), p. 4.

[38] Outlined here are two sides of the same coin, i.e. Left and Right, or non-formalist and formalist, respectively, which are confronting a crisis in realism that brings to question the role of politics to theory and vice versa. Both are projects of purity that do not recognize their fundamental dependence on the other. In other words: "Theoretically informed literary analysis that suspends all political judgment fears contamination from another direction: the contamination of theory by politics. If some of those who turn against theory in the name of politics do so by laying claim to referentiality and thematic criticism, then some of those who turn against politics in the name of theory do so by sacralizing the suspension of all reference to context." (Butler, Guillory, and Thomas, eds., *What's Left of Theory? New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), pp. viii-xii.)

[39] Often, the amount of pluralism inherent in postmodern critiques of grand narratives can also make the movement seem so normatively incapacitating that it cannot even legitimate itself. Usually, this attack on postmodernism reflects a position by those who truly wish for a return to tradition, as if modernism was not itself a cultural construct based on specific conditions.

[40] Eagleton, op cit., p. 23. According to Eagleton, culture, in this sense, as critique, arises when civilization begins to seem self-contradictory and there comes a point when a dialectical process is needed to rationalize this contradiction.

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historical progress toward an understanding of art in its social dimensions. Similarly, the critique is closely related to the genealogical method of Foucault by seeking to "transform history from a judgment on the past (in the name of a present truth) to a 'counter-memory' that combats our current modes of truth and justice, helping us to understand and change the present by placing it in a new relation to the past."[41] Understanding those genealogical moments from which knowledge about the self, and its relations to others, comes disrupts the balance of power between the dominant and subjugated by invoking new opportunities for the critical reconstruction, and interpretation, of self-identity. By analyzing and reflecting upon limits that have historically been imposed on them, it will be shown how the politics of difference have been woven into the field of art history and, subsequently, manifested in writings that concern themselves with visual art made by contemporary Native American artists. In fact, it will become evident that for artists of color, in particular, and other marginalized groups, in general, the discourse that interprets aesthetic merit of artworks is predominantly framed by the politics of identity and its relation to difference, with elements of power often defining the outcome.

The approach to be taken in this study will focus on the social and political relevance of art works because, in this case, it has been argued that the canon has been authenticated self-referentially;[42] it has often elided historical contexts that inform Native

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[41] Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 292.

[42] The suspicions against this kind of formalism extend from the process of reading a text in such a way that the text allegorizes features of textuality itself. The text is not about something other than itself, or about the world. This loss of referentiality is tantamount to the loss of political relevance. This is one characterization of "theory" and rejoinders do exist that encompass questions of context. See Butler,

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American artists, their subjects and their perspectives. In an effort to introduce the importance of context and intention into Native American art historical discourse, it is the aim of the present study to interrogate the construction of that discourse by engaging types of theories that have actively developed social issues, race studies, practices of gender and sexuality, colonial space and its aftermath, and the interstitial cultural spaces of globalization.[43] In other words, the various processes Native artists are employing to locate themselves in a contemporary context, as participants in the permanent critique of the present, will correlate with an exploration of mainstream theoretical accounts that have historically dislocated Native artists to the margins of the art world.

In the process, it is also the aim of this thesis to reveal the marginalization of the Native American contribution, in the formation of the "Western" art historical canon, because both are, inexorably, visually and conceptually bound up with one another. Though not unrelated, these two areas of inquiry are treated as if they have operated discontinuously with one another because cross-cultural interaction dictates a one-way process whereby the "Western" mainstream is lauded as the predominant voice and the Native American contribution continues to be silenced, ignored, or, more importantly, misrepresented. This condition reveals a discourse framed by postmodern evaluations intent upon interrogating types of modernism exclusively tied to the European condition, and its historical situations (if it ever decides to explore context, that is), which are borne out of modes of historicism based on European expansion, appropriation, and

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Guillory, and Thomas, eds., op cit., for a more detailed reading.

[43] The debates concerning states of theory implicate method for anyone who subscribes to one, or the other, or to many forms at once. The predicament concerns the vacillations encountered between closed, formalist accounts versus explicitly political positions. See Butler, Guillory, and Thomas, eds., op cit., for further readings into the diverse manifestations and transformations involved.

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colonization of world cultures. The situation can be fully explored when a post-colonial critique of the master narrative, or canon, bears a relationship of differing situations of power constructed on opposite sides of a system dealing with the same problems at the same time.[44] It is through such an exploration of the master text's need of the non-European "Other" that the Native American artistic experience in the U.S. and abroad can be highlighted instead of a desire for its inclusion in a duplicitous narrative known as the canon.[45]

[44] In *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 73, scholar Gayatri Spivak took a similar stance when asked about teaching English literature in the classroom. Spivak's approach to pedagogic practice reveals how master texts such as the English nineteenth-century novel needed the axiomatics of imperialism in order to construct its own identity by "othering" women and colonies to subject positions. By exploring the one's relationship to the other, Spivak reveals how each brings the other to crisis.

[45] Gerald R. McMaster, "Towards an Aboriginal Art History" in W. Jackson Rushing, ed., *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 81.

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CHAPTER II

FORMS OF RESISTANCE: THE ART OF DIEGO ROMERO[46]

> We must resist "the other," the identity that factual and objective history assigns to us, because we are undermined when we defer to that image. We must insist we retain the power of history and memory that is our due. The struggle for land, culture, community is at the very center of the vow. Inexorable. Irrevocable. History, no matter how much Western culture has diminished it, is ours.
>
> Simon Ortiz, *Memory, History, and the Present* (2004)

In the postmodern world, culture and social life have converged in the shape of aesthetics toward an emancipatory politics that reconceptualizes history, in critical terms, for those who have been unjustly marginalized. This process is visualized in Cochiti artist Diego Romero's work as a general challenge to the imperial enterprise that has historically dislocated the Native experience, and is in line with Said's desire to transform the critique by advancing "the legitimation of counternarratives of liberation to transgress ideas of nationalism in favor of a more inclusive vision of a post-imperial world."[47] This endeavor, in large measure, addresses major theoretical paradoxes pertaining to the study of and "*outside* actuality of relationships between cultures, between different Others, and between unequal imperial and nonimperial powers."[48] For example, since history has

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[46] This analysis of Romero's work draws from my essay "El espacio transcultural en la obra de Diego Romero [Transcultural Space in Context: The Art of Diego Romero]," trans. Alejandra Urdapilleta, *Estrago*, No. 3, October 2005-February 2006, pp. 69-79.
[47] Edward W. Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 1989, p. 224.
[48] Ibid., p. 216.

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proven that epistemological privilege has quite often been afforded to the Westerner, resituating the critique from a Native perspective, in order to locate artists in a contemporary context, requires overcoming the confines of history stemming from a Euro-American discourse that forces Indians to exist in a vacuous time and space. In point of fact, the dynamics of conquest and social transformation that take place in New Mexico with early contact are illustrated and addressed in works by Romero to present a critical effort toward reclaiming tradition, history, and culture from the institutional and patriarchal authority of anthropological narratives.

This challenge draws inspiration from a philosophical position based in Native thought that, according to Acoma poet Simon Ortiz, describes history as more than time-measured experience. For Ortiz, the bewildering effect of cultural invisibility pervading all aspects of contemporary Indigenous life not only originates from the imperialist domain, but contains within it a worldview and knowledge system that limits the function of memory by conflating time and history into a single, finite measurement of experience.[49] In contrast, Ortiz stresses the importance of the fluidity of memory to collapse time and space so that the connections Native people have to their past (and to their ancestors) are sustained indefinitely. In this way, memory functions to re-affirm, regenerate, and maintain Native identity as active human existence.

The idea is not unlike Benjamin's concept of aging, spelled out in "The Image of Proust,"[50] where the philosopher directs us to the difference between remembering and

[49] Simon Ortiz, "Memory, History, and the Present, 2004," TMs (photocopy), p.5; unpublished manuscript, permission granted by author, all rights reserved.
[50] Walter Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books,

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forgetting as the discrepancy between the presence and absence of the self which is never to be mistaken for identity.[51] Instead, memory is conceptualized as the instant of an experience—devoid completely of any temporality whatsoever—which only focuses on time as a purely spatial configuration that reflects images of remembrance (presence) and forgetting (absence) at a crossroads where the self is constantly re-presented.[52] The virtue of this intertwining lies in the primacy of experience over temporality through which the correspondences between absence and presence, lived synchronically, does not need recourse to temporality to disclose its existence because the weight of the past is always left behind. This correspondent process is likewise manifested in the present for Native people, according to Ortiz, as a rejuvenation of memory brought about by the reciprocal relationship between land, culture, and community.[53] As a principle, the role of memory in everyday life is tightly bound to a sense of responsibility to stand in perpetual connection to one's past in order to exist presently.[54] To Ortiz, it is a performative role that depends on everyday action:

> Land, culture, community, a mantra that is more than a memory but a vow. Memory and responsibility are bonded . . . A person has the task to fulfill a role, a reciprocal one; your people are whole when a role is performed for the sake of community as a whole, nothing else. And you, then, as a person are bound tightly within the whole, sustained as you . . .[55]

1996), pp. 201-205. The intertwining of memory and forgetfulness, the weaving and unraveling in Proust's work, according to Benjamin, is a mark of the inexorable process of aging.

[51] Amresh Sinha, "The Intertwining of Remembering and Forgetting in Walter Benjamin," *Connecticut Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Fall, 1998, p. 99. The self has a deeper resemblance with itself when it appears in the "guise" of memory. It does not appear identical to itself in memory, but much like the self in the dream world. The deeper resemblance corresponds to the mimetic feature of the image, where the image of the past does not reflect itself in memory as identical; rather, it resembles itself.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ortiz, op cit., p. 7.

[54] Ibid., pp. 3-5.

[55] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

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This reciprocal process describes history in Native cultural terms to facilitate forms of resistance by stepping outside of the confines of history in order to resist the image that history has made of the Indian as absent "other." It describes Indigenous life as an ongoing process, always in flux, which is unending and regenerative in the form of memory as remembrance and resistance.[56]

In the spirit of resistance, Romero has created work that critically engages Native cultural memory with traditional forms of ancient Mimbres pottery of the Southwest as well as mainstream narratives that are featured in Western mass culture. He has merged the two worlds on his ceramic bowls and engagé etchings in order to address a kind of living history that is in opposition to the West's positivistic portrayal of non-European peoples and places. Dominant themes in Romero's work range from conventional representations of modern Pueblo life in the Southwest, specifically, cultural memories of historical Pueblo events and pointed personal commentaries on issues that implicate a wide audience. The effectiveness of Romero's work lies in combining the seemingly innocuous medium of traditional Indian pottery with twentieth century mass culture, its antithesis in many respects. In fact, Romero offers the viewer a fresh way of seeing the "familiar" by engaging in challenging cultural critiques that play on the tensions between image and text, knowledge and ignorance, and the desires and expectations of his viewers.

Central to a discussion of Romero's critical work is the art historical significance that it already entails in mainstream accounts. One example has been provided by art

[56] Ibid., p. 18.

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historian J.J. Brody in considering the hundred small villages in southwestern New Mexico dating between 1000 and 1250 A.D. that show a remarkable kind of painted pottery that is characterized by marked continuity and moderate change.[57] In that period, the Mimbres produced a wide range of pottery with complex painted images at once nonfigurative and narrative in character and placed within framed pictorial spaces.[58] The pictorial composition was determined by vessel form while the patterning of geometric designs was aimed toward creating a three-dimensional pictorial world (Figs. 1 and 2). The reserved space in the bowl's center was often the visual focal point and any sidewall patterns were reduced to function more or less as ornate frames. According to Brody, the concept behind approaching a pot as a pictorial surface on which to put a painting is modified by mechanistic features such as the geometric designs that often frame the central area of Mimbres bowls (Fig. 3). This technique creates a pseudo-organic relationship between pictorial representations and their support surfaces.[59] Such a close interrelationship between the shape of a vessel and the forms painted on the surface is indicative of the Mimbres tradition.

After meeting Hopi potter Otelie Loloma in Santa Fe in 1986, when studying at the Institute of American Indian Arts, Romero undertook traditional Indian pottery and continued a family tradition that started with both his father and paternal grandmother.[60] Romero felt that he was heir to the Mimbres tradition because he is Pueblo Indian from Cochiti, New Mexico. The artist found the Mimbres work to be, in his own words,

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[57] J.J. Brody, *Mimbres Painted Pottery* (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), p. 1.
[58] Ibid., p. 2.
[59] Ibid., p. 137.
[60] Diego Romero, "Coding the Universe," *Studio Potter*, Vol. 23, No. 1, December, 1994, p. 72.

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Figure 1. Mimbres Classic Black-on-white bowl (Style III), 10 x 21 cm, 3.9 x 8.3 in., c. 1000-1150 C.E. Courtesy of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico. (MMA 40.4.276)

Figure 2. Mimbres Classic Black-on-white bowl (Style III), 10.5 x 23.5 cm, 4.5 x 9.3 in., c. 1000-1150 C.E. Courtesy of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico. (MMA 77.67.1)

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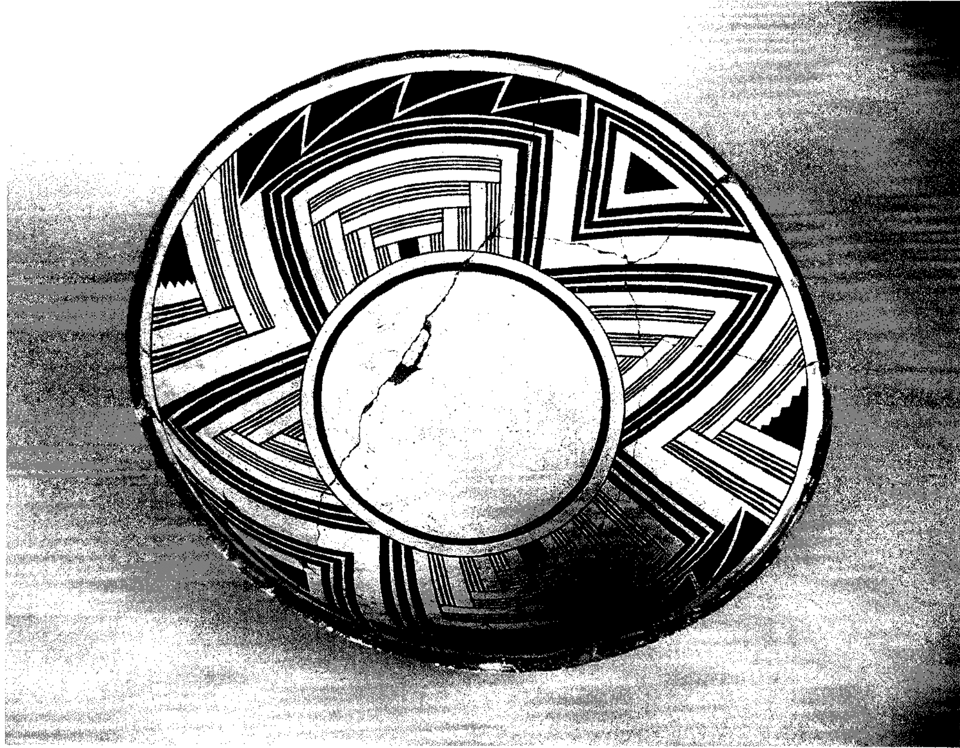

Figure 3. Mimbres Classic Black-on-white bowl (Style III), 12.5 x 26.5-29.5 cm, 4.9 x 10.4-11.6 in., c. 1000-1150 C.E. Courtesy of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico. (MMA 77.67.28)

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"Powerful…it was as if they had taken the universe apart and identified and coded it."[61] The pictorial nature of Mimbres art appealed to Romero because he observed narratives in the ceramic vessels that could be updated and applicable to modern Indian life. Brody also described the narrative images as stimulants of a different order. They present metaphors, symbols, signs, and illustrations that simultaneously function as emblems, social commentaries, and mnemonic devices for either moral, ethical, or didactic ends.[62] According to Brody, the process relied on the Mimbres variation of the southwestern decorative tradition which is mostly defined by choice of subject or motif, with concentration on certain kinds of rhythm, pictorial structure, draftsmanship, coloration, and tensions.[63]

While in his last year of graduate study at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1993, Romero studied the art of the ancient Mimbres closely while becoming increasingly aware of Indian issues concerning water rights, land distribution, and alcoholism back on the reservation. It was the artist's aim to bring these issues to the fore in his work. For example, viewing Romero's work often means being located in a determinate context where typical southwestern tropes are depicted, such as the landscape and Pueblo architecture in the ceramic rendition of the "Taos Pueblo Church" (Fig. 4). These combinations of recognizable imagery painted on the bowl find specificity in the Southwest as well as connections to Mimbres symbolism in the swirling designs (Fig. 5). However, it has been established in recent studies of southwestern art and culture that

[61] Ibid., p. 70.
[62] Brody, op cit., p. 212.
[63] Ibid., p. 138.

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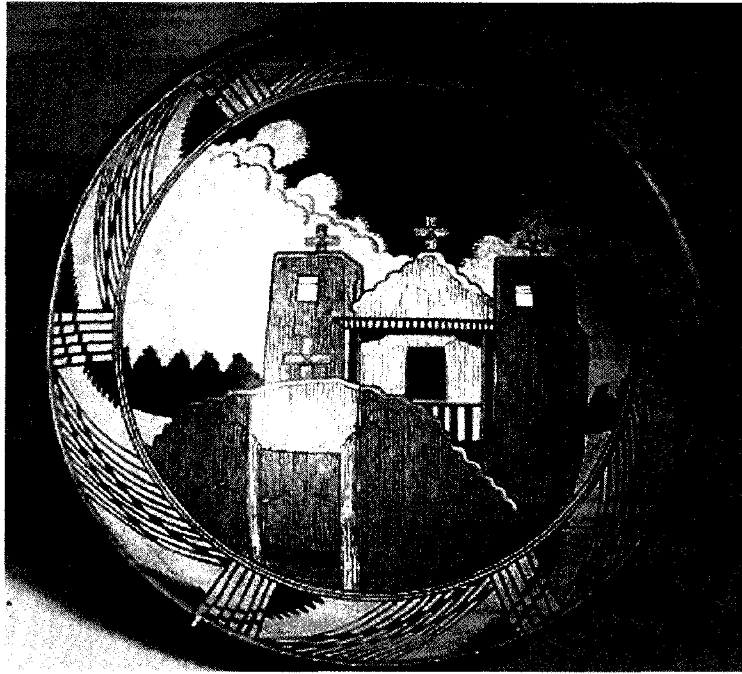

Figure 4. Diego Romero, *Taos Pueblo Church*, ceramic bowl, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

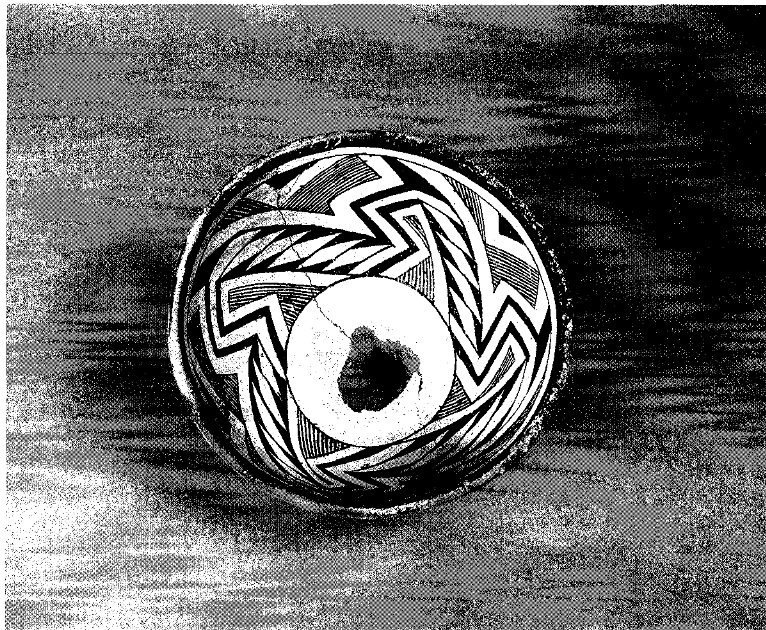

Figure 5. Mimbres Classic Black-on-white bowl (Style III), 7 x 15 cm, 2.8 x 5.9 in., c. 1000-1500 C.E. Courtesy of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico. (MMA 78.44.7)

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since the influx of tourism, in the nineteenth century, this picturesque exhibit of the Southwest has come to represent the commodification of Pueblo cultures, in general, and Pueblo people, in particular. As social anthropologist Nicholas Thomas has remarked, locations in the Southwest effect a displacement into the detached domain of the aesthetic and even the ornamental; these locations become a place of passivity, one to be seen by tourists rather than a location in which action occurs.[64]

In fact, the image of the “Taos Pueblo Church” (Fig. 6), seen in the etching, is one of the many images that can function as hegemonic signs, or symbols, of Native people and their environment that still circulate in the mass media and through the writing of scholars from the last century. According to Thomas, the kind of social theory practiced by some anthropologists has detached objects from time, and particularly so from the grimy historical time of events and intrusions.[65] Often, this kind of disempowering signification recalls works by numerous frontier painters and photographers who supposedly endeavored to capture a "vanishing race" for posterity's sake, even as they represented the Western colonial society that threatened the indigenous peoples.[66] In recent years, this body of imagery has rightly been criticized for being less a visual document than a collective Euro-American exercise in "creative" historicizing and in historical whitewashing.

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[64] Barbara Babcock quoting Nicholas Thomas, in Zena Pearlstone, ed., *Katsina: Commodified and Appropriated Images of Hopi Supernaturals* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2001), p.11.

[65] Nicholas Thomas, *Out of Time: History and Evolution in Anthropological Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 9.

[66] The examination of the displacement, denial, and differential awareness of the Southwest and its Native population is one example that has been explored by scholar Sylvia Rodriguez, in regards to the artistic mystification of the Southwest by the Taos art colony (Babcock, op cit.), p. 11.

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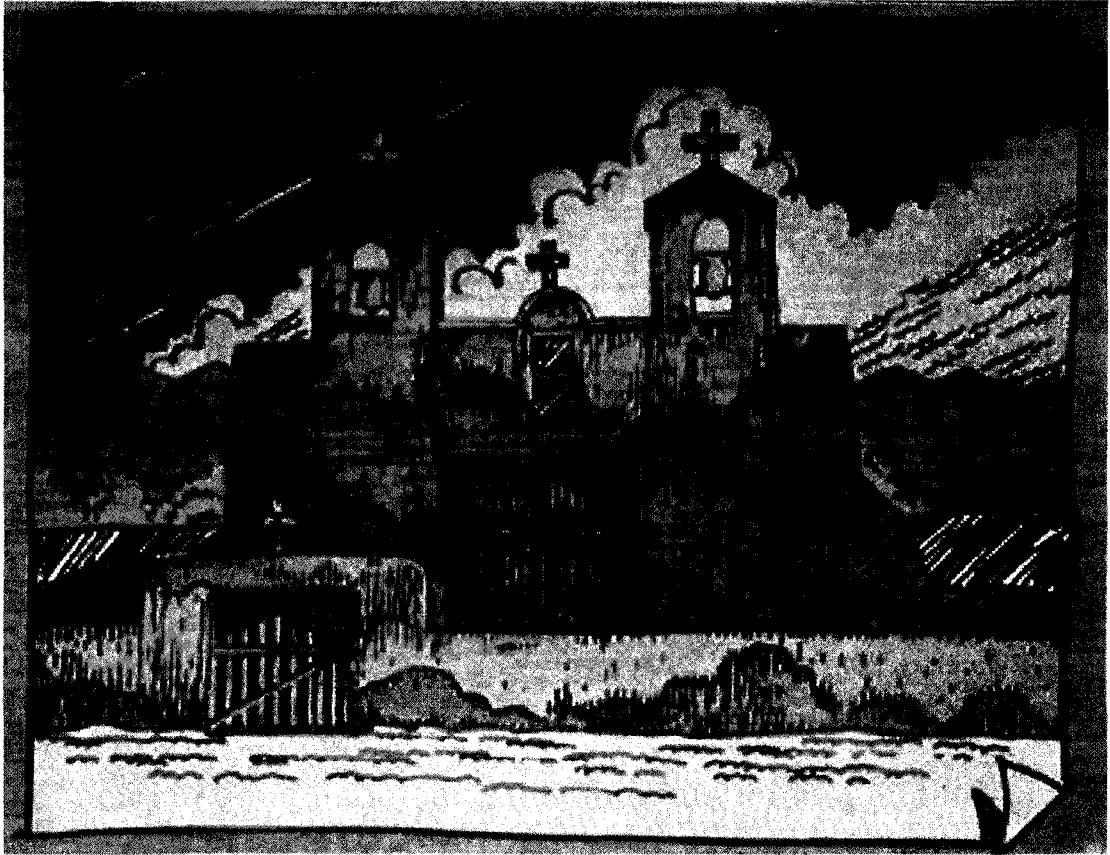

Figure 6. Diego Romero, *Taos Pueblo Church*, etching, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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On the other hand, contemporary Native artists like Romero know these "innocent" images well and have become skilled at re-presenting them in order to reveal how such ethnocentric misconceptions have hindered cross-cultural understanding by overlooking key historical events that have shaped Pueblo life. In fact, Romero's work confronts the "timelessness" of the Pueblo Southwest with narrations activated by his characters to assert Native self-definitions and viewpoints that simultaneously engage cultural memory as well as narrow, mainstream conceptions of the Indian. Often, we see the complex interplay of memory and resistance that Ortiz spoke of in the struggles of those who want to live and continue in communities determined harshly by traumatic events.[67] For example, in a bowl titled "Anno Domini 1628" (Fig. 7), Romero documents an incident where five to ten children were traded by the Catholic clergy for a bell that would eventually hang at the church in Acoma Pueblo.[68] In this bowl, as with many others, Romero uses unexpected combinations of anti-colonial images to disallow easy sentimentalism of mainstream accounts in Pueblo history. In fact, we come across images in Romero's work that often implicate the role of both the Catholic church and Spanish armies in the colonization of Pueblo communities such as in this image titled "Agents of Oppression" (Fig. 8). Furthermore, in another piece that is Untitled (Fig. 9), Romero depicts a key event that is often described as a decisive moment which sparked

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[67] Ortiz, op cit., pp. 8-10.
[68] Diego Romero, interview by the author, telephone conversation, Oklahoma City, OK., 5 October 2005. This view, concerning the events portrayed at Acoma Pueblo, comes from the artist's perspective and might not be shared by everyone.

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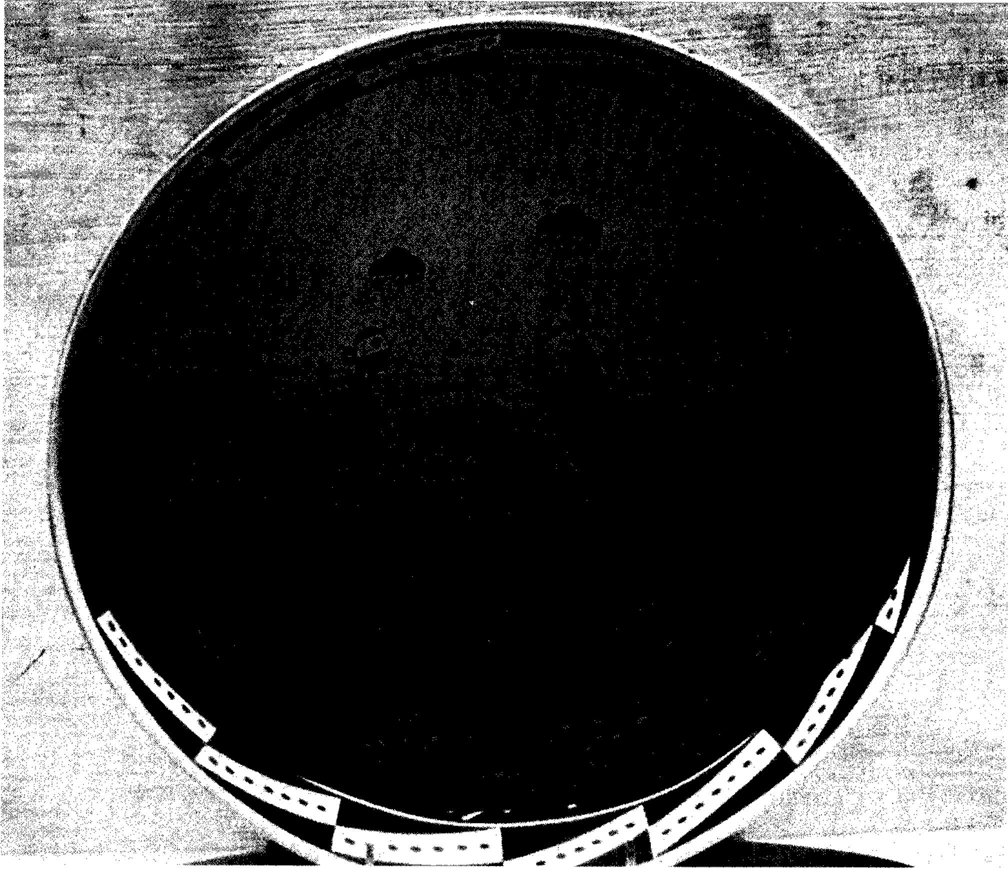

Figure 7. Diego Romero, *Anno Domini 1628*, ceramic bowl, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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Figure 8. Diego Romero, *Agents of Oppression*, ceramic bowl, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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Figure 9. Diego Romero, Untitled (Rape of San Juan Girl), ceramic bowl, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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the Pueblo Revolt of 1680—that is, the rape of a San Juan girl by Spanish soldiers still wearing their armor while a priest turns the other way to cover his eyes.[69]

In these instances, as with many others, Romero's work provides an axis of reflection based in the geographical struggles of the colonized against imperialist forces. According to Said, this geographical motif is profoundly significant in so many cultural structures of the West, even in deference to temporality, because proximity and distance produce a dynamic of conquest and transformation that intrudes upon cloistral depictions of the relationship between self and other.[70] In fact, the exercise of sheer power in exerting control over large amounts of space is so internally and historically necessary to ethnography because it enhances the active political processes of dependency, domination, and hegemony.[71] As a challenge to those processes, Romero's work presents a crisis in representation to reveal the relationship of Native history, culture, and identity through the ways in which contemporary artists perceive their local situationality and its limits. To that end, in Romero's work, one sees the intermingling between local involvements and interactions across distance that, in the modern era, refers to the process of globalization as well as colonization.

The complex interplay of social relations between the dominated and subjugated are developed by Romero's emphasis on Native issues that direct our attention to the often static and bounded nature of art historical discourse traditionally based in the

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Said, op cit., p. 218.
[71] Ibid.

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ideological union of aesthetics and anthropology.[72] These social spaces are represented in Romero's work to reflect the tensions between two distinct philosophies of space and place; that is, Native and non-Native accounts. The latter is a historicist agenda simultaneously based in ethnographic and anthropological misconceptions that have historically constructed ideas of Native culture through an aesthetics of diversity and culture collecting. The former is simply a resistance to overcome those limiting viewpoints by exploring and disrupting the relations of power in order to transcend ideologies determining the essentialization, marginalization, and normalization of the Indian as "other." In fact, Romero's position is in line with Ortiz's intent to preserve the concrete connection between past and present through the means of memory and history:

> This is the present then. Memory and history have gathered us in the present . . . There is no choice but to resist. In the lands, cultures, communities of the continents now known as the Americas, Indigenous peoples have been in resistance for more than five hundred hard years. Without resistance—guided by memory as a living history—we could not have continued. And today in the present, we live.[73]

Subversive Effects: Parody, Irony, and Indian Life

In another account that articulates these forms of resistance, art historian Allan Ryan invokes a method of reading contemporary Native art through the application of a theory of parody to reveal overlooked issues.[74] Ryan's reconsideration suggests four

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[72] According to Eagleton, this ideological union belongs to a 'high culture' of cultivated intellectuals whose idea of culture represents a mythic duality, pivoting between the concrete and a utopia, based on the "other" whom they hope can revitalize their own degenerate society. In the same way, modernist art turns to primeval notions in order to survive a philistine modernity. In Eagleton's estimation, these concepts mark the point where the overbred and the underdeveloped forge strange alliances (Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 24).
[73] Ortiz, op cit., p. 21.
[74] Allan J. Ryan, "Postmodern Parody: A Political Strategy in Contemporary Canadian Native Art," *Art*

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overlapping themes: the reformulation of an anti-colonial self-identity, the post-colonial revision of history from a Native perspective, the contesting of hegemonic U.S. symbols, and critical rejoinders by Native Americans to global issues. In fact, scholar Linda Hutcheon has stated that parody seems to have become the favored mode of expression for those who are marginalized by a hegemonic ideology.[75] This happens because parody seems to offer a perspective on the past and also the present which, consequently, allows an artist to speak to an ascendant discourse from a dissident position within it. In his magisterial 1969 book titled *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto,* Native scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., also encouraged scholars to examine irony, along with satire, to gain a better understanding of the collective psyche and alternative values of Native Americans.[76] Even though Deloria's viewpoints have seldom been the major focus of investigation in the visual arts of Native people, it is in work like Romero's that alternative histories are revealed and effectively articulated to offer a new way of seeing the intricacies inherent to Native cultural aesthetics.

According to mainstream architect Charles Jencks, the best postmodern art works are those that are double-coded, or ironic—and these are, in fact, tools that have often been employed by contemporary Native artists. This might be because irony, with its multiple dimensions, can be an elusive element, one that is hard to pin down and is not easily definable, which allows varied interpretations of artworks. One of the most complex themes that Romero deals with in his work is that of self-identity and self-

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Journal, Vol. 51, No. 3, Fall, 1992, p. 59.

[75] Ibid., Ryan quoting Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 35.

[76] Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pp. 146-167.

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representation. His extensive body of work incorporates the actions of two characters he developed who function across spatial and cultural boundaries by embodying a metaphor for an entire way of life that is played out in visual imagery. The Chongo Brothers are mythical figures (derived from Mimbres variations) that inhabit a duality of "good" and "bad" characteristics, depending on the commentaries Romero wishes to make about conditions of Indian life in the modern Southwest.[77] However, the "bad" side of the Chongo Brothers perhaps necessitates the most social commentary because, in various contexts, they, along with Coyote, represent the personification of the disenfranchised individual, or the subordinated culture. In both "good" and "bad" instances, Romero's characters impose an active human existence—which locates them in a contemporary context—to explore the social dimensions of Native life still reeling from the effects of "Western" modernization.

For example, in the American Highway series, the Chongo Brothers are being led astray by Coyote and cruising the highways and byways of New Mexico (Fig. 10). In the cycle, Romero narrates stories about a disenfranchised people, their marginalized culture, and the colonizing people who capitalize on that disenfranchised culture.[78] The etching contrasts the blandness of the picturesque landscape with the matter-of-fact intrusion of a gas station that has become a common symbol found beside many highways. Romero thinks the "endless" American highway offers an unlimited source of cultural imagery and extends this theme to other works such as "Santa Clara Canyon" (Fig. 11) and

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[77] Romero, "Coding the Universe," p. 73. Romero has often said that the Chongo Brothers were inspired by representations of similar figurative forms found on Mimbres bowls. The name "chongo" refers to the character's hairstyle which is wrapped in a bun at the nape of the neck.
[78] Ibid.

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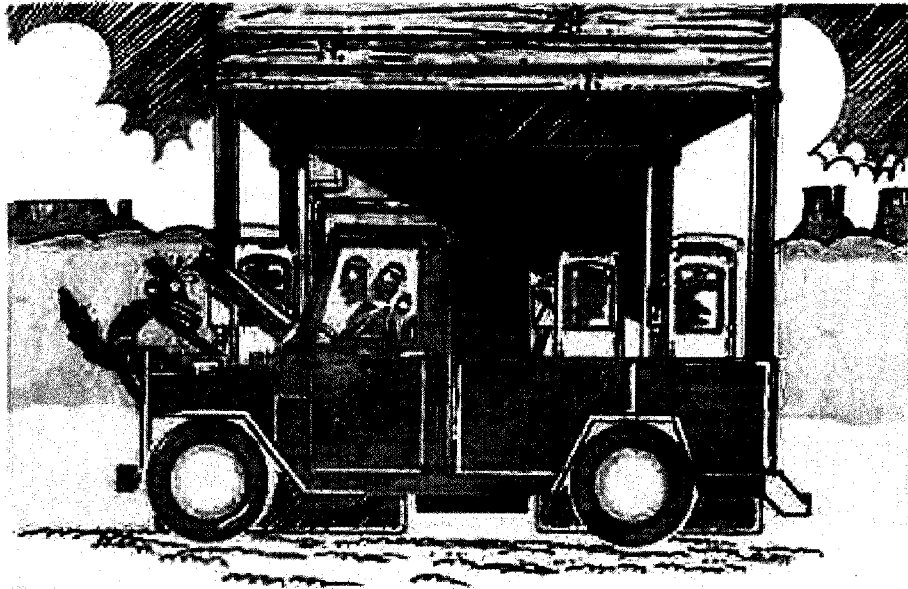

Figure 10. Diego Romero, *American Highway Series*, etching, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

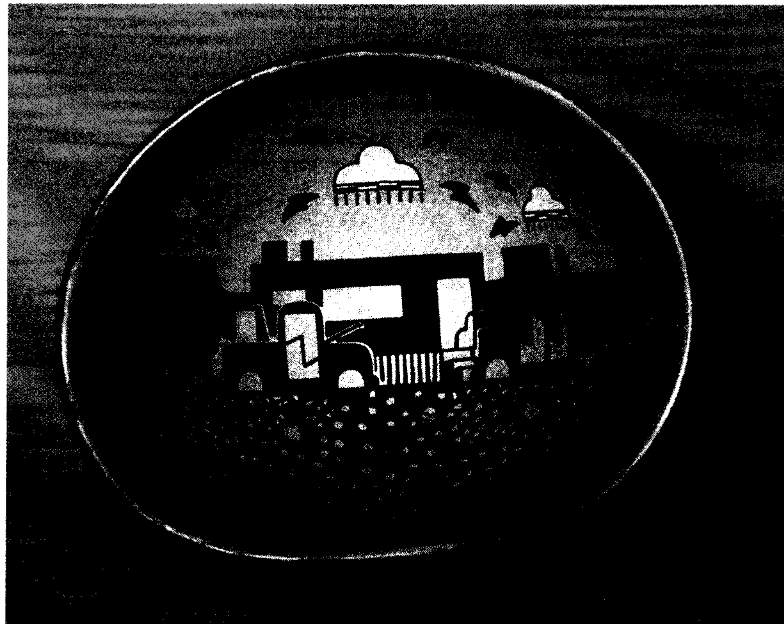

Figure 11. Diego Romero, *Santa Clara Canyon*, ceramic bowl, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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"Cadillac Ranch" (Fig. 12), which is based on the artist group Ant Farm's sculptural work located beside the highway in Amarillo, Texas. The contrast between technological intrusiveness in the landscape, and the characters driving along the highway, provides a strong statement about the forced industrialization of Indian land. In fact, Romero thinks the pickup truck functions as a symbol for American consumerism, and its orgy of waste, that uses and dispels everything. However, the critical, and somewhat humorous, aspect of the etching (Fig. 10) is the placement of Coyote under the hood of the pickup truck, thus implying that consumerism too can "break-down."

Since Romero has artistically transformed and critically re-contextualized these key historical figures into a more easily accessible visual form the characters function in a provocative way across spatial and cultural boundaries. In so doing, Romero has successfully elicited the primary function of parody, which is the critical reworking of history. When Romero included Coyote, a figure that he believes can also been found on Mimbres bowls, as a character in his narratives, he became submerged within a dissident position. Romero has stated, "the coyote is the classic Indian trickster, the gambler, a buffoon among buffoons, the king of the disenfranchised."[79] It is that same Trickster, whose countless adventures and comic exploits have entertained, educated, and engaged generations of Native peoples. His influence has left a lasting impression on the work and practice of many Native artists, so that even "Western" modernization cannot easily expunge his critical reflections.

[79] Romero, "Coding the Universe," p. 75.

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Figure 12. Diego Romero, *Cadillac Ranch*, ceramic bowl, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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Romero's inclusion of Coyote, or the Trickster, is, in fact, a compelling construction, because the figure articulates a subversive effect known as the "trickster shift."[80] It is perhaps best understood as "serious play," the ultimate goal of which is a radical shift in viewer perspective, and even political re-positioning, by imagining alternative viewpoints to those offered by the mainstream "West." This process is in keeping with the tart humor involved in Romero's work because Coyote's identity is inextricably bound up with reflexive behavior and defined by activist performance, such as can be seen in "Coyote and the Disciples of Vine Deloria" (Fig. 13) where the Chongo brothers are, again, being led astray by Coyote. This time, the brothers are cruising in their pickup truck and toting a machine gun, perhaps in an attitude reflecting Deloria's radical politics, while Coyote is drinking a bottle of alcohol behind the wheel.

In many Native societies, Trickster narratives were, and to some extent still are, used to teach culturally self-reflective attitudes and matching behavior. Often, the stories are told in great detail, but the moral of the story is never completely explained, since one has to solve the problem by oneself. Because Trickster tales are admonitions, instructions, and entertainment all at once, it is difficult for some to resolve the incongruities in the serious joking. Such incongruities are characterized by disparate ideas, or disjointed relationships.[81] In a study about joke perception, anthropologist Mary Douglas has characterized all jokes as having a dissenting, perhaps even subversive effect

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[80] Allan J. Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 1999), p. 5.
[81] Robert Goodkind, "Effects of Complexity, Incongruity, and Content on Cartoon Humor Appreciation" (M.A. thesis, University of New Mexico, 1974), p. 4.

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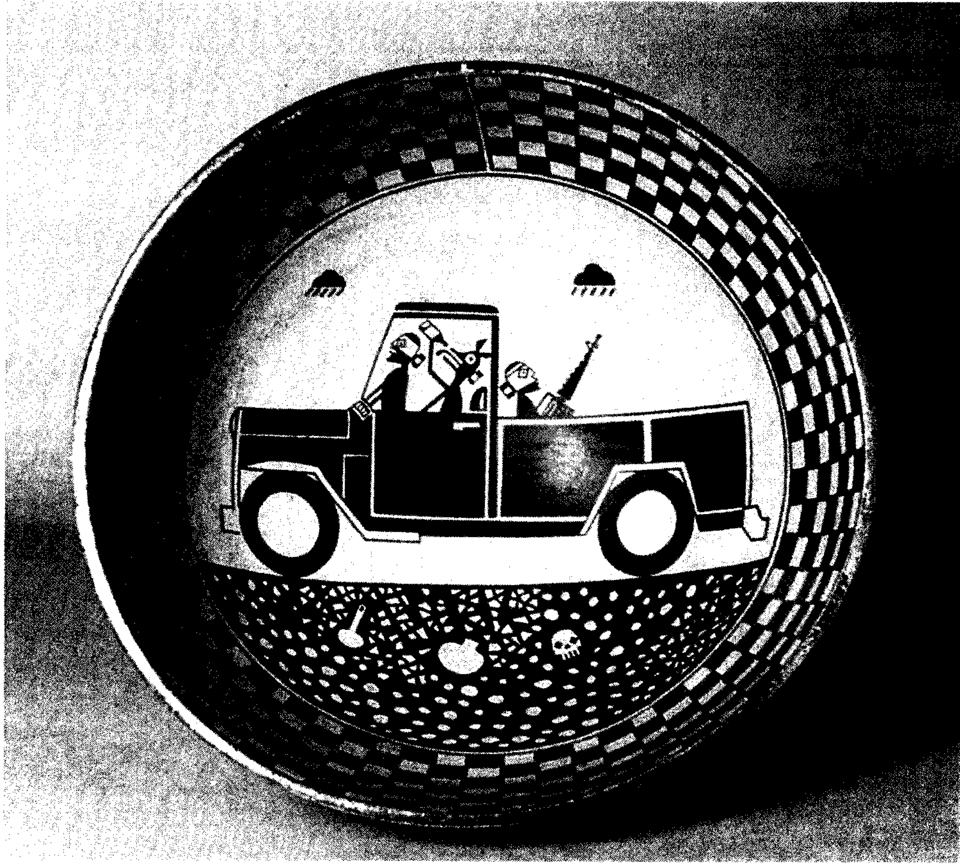

Figure 13. Diego Romero, *Coyote and the Disciples of Vine Deloria*, ceramic bowl, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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on the dominant structure of ideas.[82] The provocation of a joke lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective. In that sense, the joke affords the realization that an accepted pattern has no natural necessity, but is only historically contingent. According to Douglas, a successful joke imagines the contesting of something formally organized by something informal, unregulated and energetic, so that the balance of power is changed, even if only momentarily.

The Indian Trickster often employs the informal role as that non-static, energetic presence. Thus, the trickster reveals a reality that is double-sided, or double-coded. In a word, the Trickster embodies the socially ironic. He is half-hero, half-fool; an active and definite presence in Native society who does not enter into the realm of the museum being, or emerge as an aesthetic artifact. In that way, the figure of the Trickster functions creatively as parody's chief rhetorical tactic in the strategic reworking of history from a close, yet critical distance. In fact, it is the Trickster's presence that allows the ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity to be disclosed. In the process, there exists an affirmation of the critical links between subversive practice, aesthetic production, and cultural wisdom, to decolonize Native history.

Contact Zones: Transcultural Space in Context

Additionally, the Chongo Brothers, too, encompass important roles and concepts in Romero's work since they are considered by the artist to be modern derivatives of the Hero Twins (also probably found on Mimbres bowls), who are mythical figures well-

[82] Ryan quoting Mary Douglas, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 1999), p. 5.

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established for Pueblo, Apache, and Navajo peoples.[83] The Hero Twins are generally seen as protectors of the earth who defend it against misdeeds and bad happenings. They are the monster slayers, but they can also be mischievous and disobedient. The twins have also been known to bring trouble on themselves and innocent bystanders by their free-spirited carelessness. In fact, the duality of the Hero Twins is personified in the Chongo Brothers; they, too, have a good side and a bad one. In an etching titled "Hector at the Ships" (Fig. 14), Romero simultaneously draws upon Greek references to the Trojan War and the warrior-like characteristics of the Chongo Brothers (who have set fire to the church blazing in the background) to emphasize their mythical qualities as protectors of the earth. In that image, as well as in "The Martyrdom of Fray Francisco Jesus" (Fig. 15), the brothers are effectively defending Indian communities from outside enemies.

Romero's characters actively function across spatial and cultural boundaries in critical situations consisting of tension-filled transcultural spaces. According to scholar David Tomas, transcultural spaces identify the dynamics informing culture contact and the conflicting modes of habitual perceptions that shape everyone's concept of boundaries across time and space.[84] This space is characterized by the visual representation of analytical differentiations in a culture's symbolism, language and attitude, as in Romero's work. As a constitutive dimension of social activity, transcultural spaces often reflect the overlap of political agendas and epistemologies inherent to the process of globalization, which shape the ways people use and perceive

[83] Romero, "Coding the Universe," p. 73.
[84] David Tomas, *Transcultural Space and Transcultural Beings* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 1-5.

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Figure 14. Diego Romero, *Hector at the Ships*, etching, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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Figure 15. Diego Romero, *The Martyrdom of Fray Francisco Jesus*, ceramic vessel, 25.4 x 17.78 cm, 1995. Courtesy of the artist.

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their present situations. However, generally speaking, transcultural spaces encompass the conflicts over power that arise between people with differing customs, manners, and languages.[85] In most cases, these spaces produce transient situations often governed by misrepresentation, or representational excess, rooted in contested or destabilized territorial zones following first- or early contact events between Western and non-Western peoples.[86]

The humorous and often sardonic nature of intercultural conflicts is sharply illustrated by Romero in the etchings and paintings of the Conquistador, Don Diego de Vargas. It is in such etchings that Romero's work concerns the existence and dynamics of a tense intercultural space that is occupied by Western and non-Western peoples. In the "Coming of Diego" (Fig. 16), Romero has made a traditional Indian vessel and painted a comic-style rendition of the Conquistador with accompanying text on the side of the vessel. The text reads "1692...Don Diego de Vargas, Most Feared of All the Ruthless Invaders! Plots the Righteous Conquest and Colonization of the Pueblo Indians." In the background, a Pueblo community is situated on a mesa with rolling clouds in the distance. A sense of impending doom is accurately represented by the idyllic setting of the Pueblo by the placement of de Vargas in the foreground and by the text accompanying the image.

In an etching titled "When Titans Collide" (Fig. 17), Romero takes the idea further by engaging de Vargas and Chongo in a fight scene against a Pueblo church and landscape in the background. The allusion to heroic figures is in keeping with the artist's

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

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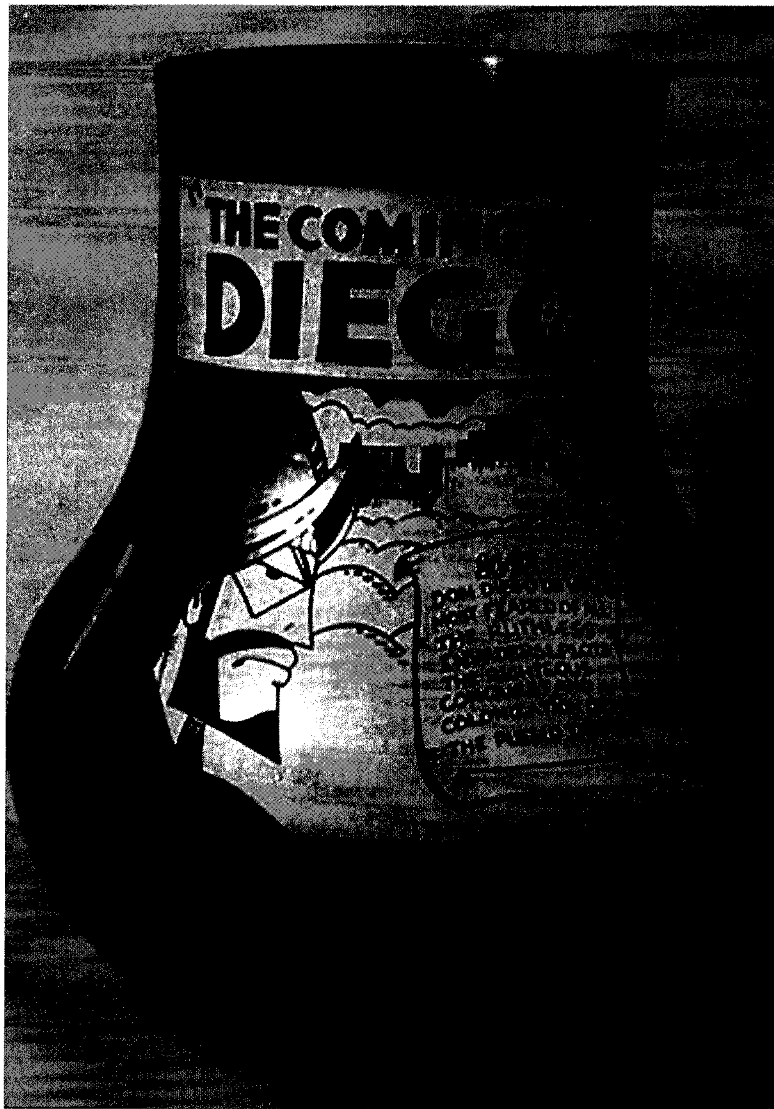

Figure 16. Diego Romero, *The Coming of Diego*, ceramic vessel, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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Figure 17. Diego Romero, *When Titans Collide*, etching, 1990s. Courtesy of the artist.

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broader aims of dealing with and portraying the bloody colonization of the Pueblos that began with the belligerent arrival of the Spanish. The addition of text and bubbles that indicate speech have Chongo saying "Your evil ends here Diego, prepare for battle." De Vargas responds to Chongo in a rather ethnocentric and derogatory way by saying "Pinche Indio." The most important addition to the etching, however, is the text at the lower right-hand corner, where Chongo's speech has been "translated into English from Indian." This small piece of information relegated to the bottom corner of the image is very effective in focusing the viewer's attention on the historic differences between de Vargas and Chongo in the original setting.

According to Canadian cultural critic Alan Gowen, popular and commercial arts often incorporate a historic understanding of the world as an unsettled place of struggle between good and evil.[87] One image that has consistently carried this kind of conviction for human beings has been the battlefield where "Good combats Evil." A cartoon image of de Vargas versus Chongo establishes and maintains this perception because it corresponds to something inculcated in its audience's experience. In the etching, the artist makes a complete cartoon. His use of line in depicting sweat falling from both characters' foreheads, the oversized bodies and musculature, and the fight scene, in general, is aptly comic book-like, at once funny and serious. The spectacular nature of Romero's narrative style causes the viewer to conjure up images of characters like Superman, Spiderman, and others, when looking at the etching. However, the historical reference to mythologies, language, and culture are supplemented by symbolism that

[87] Alan Gowans, *Learning to See: Historical Perspectives on Modern Popular/Commercial Arts* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), p. 225.

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allows the protagonists and villains to be molded into metaphors of contemporary Indian life. According to Gowen, all civilizations have developed vehicles "appropriate" to their backgrounds and the necessity of imagining this dualism in perceptive allegorical form.[88]

The imagery from the culture industry that Romero cites metaphorically, when creating transcultural spaces in his work, is a testament to the "alternative modernity" of his narratives. In fact, interpreting Romero's work in terms of transcultural space permits a critique of traditional space-place dichotomies that serve the ideological, as well as economic, purposes occasioned by colonialism with the yielding of an aestheticized primitiveness, or "otherness," imposed by the West. This challenge seeks a restructuring of power relations by taking into account the overlapping of social, cultural, and linguistic differences through a model of dialogic interaction. For Bakhtin, dialogue is not just a mode of interaction but, rather, a way of communal existence in which people establish a multifaceted relationship of mutual interdependence across real and imagined boundaries created within and between cultures, social groups and ethnic communities.[89] In effect, seeing the relationship between the dominated and subjugated dialectically enables the understanding and negotiating of differences, their connectedness, and meaning in a dialogue of different consciousnesses and discourses.[90] In particular, the cultural-semiotic landscape implicit in Romero's work imagines transcultural space between cultural binaries as asymmetrical and, at the same time, offers the possibility of

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[88] Ibid.
[89] Alex Kostogriz, "Rethinking Spatiality of Literary Practices in Multicultural Conditions" (paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, Australia, 28 November-2 December 2004), p. 5. Kostogriz offers a Bakhtinian (dialogical) perspective on the use of cultural-semiotic spaces to address social, cultural, and political issues involved in the literacy education of migrant, minority and socially disadvantaged students.
[90] Ibid., p. 3.

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constructing new meanings and new understandings of cultural difference through the critical reconstruction of self from a Native perspective.[91]

From this point of view, it is much easier to see how the fondled myths of nationness and wholeness, central to ethnocentric and nationalist discourse, are constructed around personal issues of identity with elements of power often defining the outcome. Romero's work succeeds in contesting such views in favor of promoting what Bakhtin called "moments of genuine transformation that are realized in opening up a new semantic depth of meaning" to permit the coexistence of multiple social voices and identities in the same space (beyond a mere celebration of differences and cultural multivoicedness).[92] This dialogic process is crucial in articulating Native human existence in the U.S. by placing (in a new relation to the past) alternative modes of Native thought and knowledge systems concerning history, culture, and identity formation. In those instances, the Indian will have established the virtue of actually existing by measuring itself against the norms which the "West" has constructed. In particular, mainstream historical accounts concerning the Indian will be challenged to incorporate social and historical dimensions that have, for one reason or another, been either blatantly ignored or conveniently assimilated into "Western" civilization's grand narrative of human self-development through the abstraction of Native identity and presence as difference, or otherness.

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[91] Ibid., p. 6.
[92] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

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CHAPTER III

A SENSE OF PLACE: LAND, CULTURE, COMMUNITY

> *Nistaomeno* (In the past of long ago), the Great Mysterious Life-Giver planted the first people in the ground-womb of the Great Mother Earth and gave them spiritual-rooted lifeways that are anchored in the dirt and soil of this land comprising the Western Hemisphere . . . Thus, the natural people of this land, the culturally and spiritually diverse first nations, have long-standing and continuous caretaking responsibilities for maintaining the sanctity of the earth.
>
> Henrietta Mann, *Earth Mother and Prayerful Children: Sacred Sites and Religious Freedom* (2003)

In a brochure for an exhibition titled *Modern Native American Abstraction* (1983), curator Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne and Arapaho) articulates how knowledge of the contemporary reality of Native Americans lies in understanding the personal relationships to the land, families, and tribes of which they originate.[93] Along with the works of other Native artists, such as, Sylvia Lark (Seneca), Larry Emerson (Navajo), Emmi Whitehorse (Navajo), and Lorenzo Clayton (Navajo), Heap of Birds presents an array of visions that actively develop this Native reality into a broad visual language that, while not tied to specific icons or symbols, speaks of a Native past and present in an open, original, and creative manner.[94] The abstract paintings suggest a strong sense of homeland with images, forms, and colors interacting to describe each individual's

[93] Edgar Heap of Birds, "Introduction," *Modern Native American Abstraction*, Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, 10 December-8 January 1983, p. 2.
[94] Ibid.

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explorations of the land, culture, and community from the differing trajectories that have shaped their personal experiences as artists, tribal members, and human beings. For a majority of these artists, interacting with the land means engaging with a physical location that is also a site of struggle to protect the collective cultural and spiritual memory of indigenous life-ways in contemporary American society.

In a survey of contemporary Native American fiction and poetry, scholar Joan Heiges Blythe explores the interrelation of land, language, community, and compassion as central elements in writers with American Indian roots such as Simon Ortiz, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Joy Harjo, to only name a few.[95] By grounding language in land, Blythe outlines an aesthetic education rooted in the landscape which allows for a unification of intellectual and sensual appreciations of the vital, or material, connection of land to language. To Blythe, this linkage functions as a core aesthetic for American Indian artists and reflects moral imperatives that affirm the material reality of language as "real" to the extent that it has contact with or finds a literal level in earth.[96] In other words, Blythe advocates for an aesthetics of the dust—as in, 'In the beginning was the Land'—as a means toward highlighting a perspective often ignored and overlooked by contemporary critical theorists.[97]

Blythe's rereading of contemporary critical-aesthetic theory addresses the foundations of a language of theory that, she believes, has increasingly become more detached from the life forces of earth, memory, community and compassion. In fact, it is

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[95] Joan Heiges Blythe, "Aesthetics of the Dust; or, In the Beginning Was the Land," in James Soderholm, ed., *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in an Age of Cultural Studies* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1997), pp. 142-161.
[96] Ibid., p. 143.
[97] Ibid.

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Blythe's contention that, for many centuries, theorists have focused on a Western European language theory "dominated by an essentially Augustinian position that language has aesthetic/moral validity to the extent to which it is grounded on belief in the word of God made flesh in His Son, or 'In the beginning was the Word'."[98] This concept extends from a Christian theological, aesthetic theory that defines beauty in terms of the recognition of truth, or God, which, ultimately, is deemed invisible and without earthly basis.[99] In this context, aesthetic understanding is relegated to the level of the supreme, or incorporeal, to systematize a general hegemony of mind over matter through which the repudiation of the body, and all bodily impulses, determined the moral worth of sensuous experience. From this perspective, pre-medieval and medieval aesthetics is best understood as part and parcel of the ascetic system in which a moral fanaticism destroyed paganism and the history of religious coercion came to overshadow that of aesthetics.[100]

In effect, Blythe chooses to align her methodology with that of John Ruskin's, whose reverence for landscape reflected a belief that art must have a literal referent in nature since it is only through earth-knowing that language can be redeemed for the

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[98] Ibid. In a footnote, Blythe explains that the linguistic theoretical orientation of many contemporary writers, while not word/Christ centered, are still logo-anthropomorphic.

[99] Ekbert Faas, *The Genealogy of Aesthetics* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 48-49. This idea of the aesthetic is traced back to Plato and Plotinus who are said to have provided the philosophical underpinnings of Augustine's Christian theology and aesthetics. Specifically, it was Plato's will to annihilate the passions and Plotinus' obsession with evil (which foreshadows Augustine's own questioning of the causes of evil in his *Confessions*) that one can trace back traditional categories that configure the "beautiful" in terms echoing "the eternal, absolute, or transcendent."

[100] Ibid., p. 64. In addition, Faas extends this line of thinking to the "complete arsenal of what, in varying combinations, would be deployed, first by the Christian Roman Empire in Augustine's time, then by the medieval theocracy, and finally by the *Nineteen Eighty-Four*-type totalitarian regimes of more recent times."

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moral perception and appreciation of ideas of beauty.[101] Ruskin's thought is inseparably bound up with ethical concerns for the forces of labor and the societal forces which impede true aesthetic judgments. In this view, Ruskin's "theoretic" (as opposed to "aesthetic") emphasized the moral and ethical belief that art must promote harmony and depends upon perceiving nature hands-on through a committed sense of place rather than through mere sensual, abstracted perceptions.

According to Cheyenne scholar Henrietta Mann, Native people have always lived in mutual relationship with the earth as its caretakers for thousands of years and that is affirmed by their observance of ceremonies that revitalize and renew the earth.[102] In fact, as land-based cultures, Mann emphasizes the theologies of the first nations as rooted in the landscape of the earth (as mother to her children) in a sacred relationship that is characterized by prayerful love and deep religious reverence for holy ground.[103] For many Native artists and writers, this sacred bond accounts for the survival of Indian culture and the continuous struggles against federal Indian policies that threaten to extinguish those ways of life. Since these geographic locations represent the crossroads where identity, self-determination, and spiritual rootedness take place, it makes sense that the most significant and pressing dilemma facing Native North Americans today is, namely, the dispute over land.[104]

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[101] Blythe, op cit., p. 145. Ruskin's ideas about nature, morality, and art are expounded in his five-volume *Modern Painters* (1843-60) which started out as a study for the justification of J.M.W. Turner's genius.
[102] Henrietta Mann, "Earth Mother and Prayerful Children: Sacred Sites and Religious Freedom," in Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins, eds., *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance* (Kansas: University Press, 2003), p. 194.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., p. 201.

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"Born From Sharp Rocks": Political Agency and Public Awareness

While in Geneva, Switzerland, curating and participating in a group show titled *No Beads, No Trinkets* (1984) at the United Nations, artist Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds listened to the proceedings of Non-Governmental Organizations representing indigenous cultures from the Americas.[105] It was while observing an indigenous man from Brazil speaking on behalf of his community to protest the deforestation of his homelands, which would have paved the way for the building of a Disneyland, that Heap of Birds was inspired by a phrase he would eventually use in a language installation for a show titled *Sharp Rocks* (Fig. 18). The phrase, "Unlike, Folkloric Distraction [written backwards], Possible Lives," refers to the argument put forth by the indigenous man from Brazil who did not want his community to become a spectacle for "folkloric distractions" because of the tourist siege that Disneyland would incur in his homeland. To Heap of Birds, these thoughts were also applicable to the vicissitudes shaping Indian life in the U.S. and, subsequently, served as "insurgent messages to the public, delivered through art, to present the fact that Native Americans are decidedly different from the dominant white culture in America."[106] With *Sharp Rocks*, Heap of Birds sought to educate white Americans about the injustices of contemporary Indian life by highlighting the existence of Indian reservations on the American landscape which consisted of poor standards of

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[105] Edgar Heap of Birds, interview by the author, tape recording, Oklahoma City, OK., 7 February 2007. The names "Hachivi" and "Hock E Aye Vi" will be used interchangeably to cite references where the artist's name has been published in either manner. Both words are different spellings of the same Cheyenne name given to him by his grandmother, Alice Heap of Birds, which translates into English as "Little Chief." The artist adopted the more accurate spelling, "Hock E Aye Vi," in the past few years and now uses it exclusively.

[106] Edgar Heap of Birds, "Artist's Statement," *Born From Sharp Rocks*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 12 April-12 June, 1986, p. 1.

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Figure 18. Lightning Woman (Alice Heap of Birds) and her grandson Edgar Heap of Birds with the language installation *Possible Lives*, painted die cut letters, 1985. Photo by David Priest.

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living conditions where housing is insufficient, quality of health care very low, and the rates of infant mortality and suicide abnormally high.[107]

As one of the enduring symbols of U.S. governmental policies of segregation and assimilation set in motion over a century ago, Indian reservations form the background against conflicting attitudes toward the land, as well as the crossroads where historical and contemporary indigenous religious rights issues have their genesis.[108] According to Mann, at variance are the belief systems held by the immigrant population (stemming from the Anglo-European invasion of the Americas) that justified their presence on this continent with the doctrine of Manifest Destiny.[109] Under this doctrine, land became nothing more than a commodity to be subdued and, by the will of God, the settlers "absolved themselves of all responsibility for their appearance in a land occupied by other men."[110] By assessing President Ulysses S. Grant's policy on Indian reservations, Mann outlines the damaging "peace policy" of 1869 that effectively imprisoned tribal peoples in bordered territories where the Christianization of all Indian life proceeded to suppress and destroy Indian religious ceremony and indigenous sacred ways. For example, by banning Indian religious ceremonies such as the Sun Dance, Snake Dance, Ghost Dance, Potlatch Ceremony, and the use of peyote for religious purposes, federal

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[107] Brian Wallis, "With Reservations," exhibition essay, *Born From Sharp Rocks*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 12 April-12 June, 1986, p. 2.
[108] Mann, op cit., p. 195.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., Mann quoting Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), p. 249.

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agencies were effectively trying to exterminate belief systems that were embedded, assembled, and bound in the earth.[111]

At a recent conference in Venice, Italy, scholar Jean Fisher reiterated the general consensus held in contemporary Native America (including the art world) that indigenous peoples continue to be engaged in anti-colonial and neo-colonial struggles—notably, juridical recognition of cultural, territorial, and political sovereignty—while simultaneously grappling with more generalized postcolonial issues.[112] As a challenge to this oppressive system, a type of political re-positioning has been employed by Native artists, including Heap of Birds, to advance cultural intervention at particular sites of power in the mainstream. Heap of Birds enacts in a variety of media—including works on paper, language installations, videotapes, sculptures, and paintings—to exhibit a worldview extending from a circular awareness of the earth that is "derived from living on the land and learning that human interaction mirrors the forces in the landscape."[113] For that reason, the centrality of land is critical, in Heap of Birds' work, toward forming a sense of place as the basis for creating vital connections between people, cultures, and histories through art. In that way, his artistic practice encompasses an earth awareness that originates within Cheyenne cultural teachings and ceremonial ways where, he says:

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[111] Ibid. Furthermore, despite laws espousing the separation of church and state, the federal government worked with Christian denominations by entrusting the nomination of federal agents in charge of reservations for the administering of Indian education activities that essentially amounted to federally subsidized church group schools known as boarding schools.

[112] Jean Fisher, "New Contact Zones," in *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution, 2006), p. 42. This book contains the published proceedings of the National Museum of the American Indian's symposium "Vision, Space, Desire" held at the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti, Venice, Italy, 13 December 2005.

[113] Edgar Heap of Birds, *Sharp Rocks* (Buffalo, New York: CEPA Gallery, 1986), p. 1.

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> The land is the beginning and end. It is to humble yourself and know that the land and earth comes first before the people: somewhat like caring for the children first because they are precious, although we are not parents of land...Of course as someone grows to know certain sites on this earth then it can cradle you, reaffirm you, and offer you a relationship. Also the earth remains after you are gone and was here before with one's distant relatives.[114]

For Heap of Birds, making art is conducive to working a sharp rock insofar as its utility as a combative tactic is transformed into an artistic endeavor that serves living Native Americans by placing works pointedly, in protest, toward the center of mainstream U.S. culture.[115] Thus, access to these types of media provide protection just as arrow points (sharp rocks) were weapons of war for the defense and welfare of the tribe, as well as tools of preservation for hunting game animals.[116] Therefore, in his opinion, the electronic and print media have always provided an alternative for minority artists to use expressive forms advocating rights and beliefs that simultaneously engage and protest hierarchical powers of relation in the mainstream. It is mainly through these language installations that messages find their way into the public sphere by encompassing a form of media communication that is easily accessible and, therefore, wide reaching.

In the large-scale print titled "Telling Many Magpies, Telling Black Wolf, Telling Hachivi," Heap of Birds constructs a word piece that addresses the insidious nature of American consumerist society that wishes to exploit and dominate everything it can from Indians (Fig. 19). In writing the word "Natural" backwards, Heap of Birds protests this

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[114] Nick Blomley, "Artistic Displacements: An Interview with Edgar Heap of Birds," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 22, Issue 6, December, 2004, p. 799.
[115] Heap of Birds, "Artist's Statement," *Sharp Rocks*, p. 1.
[116] Ibid.

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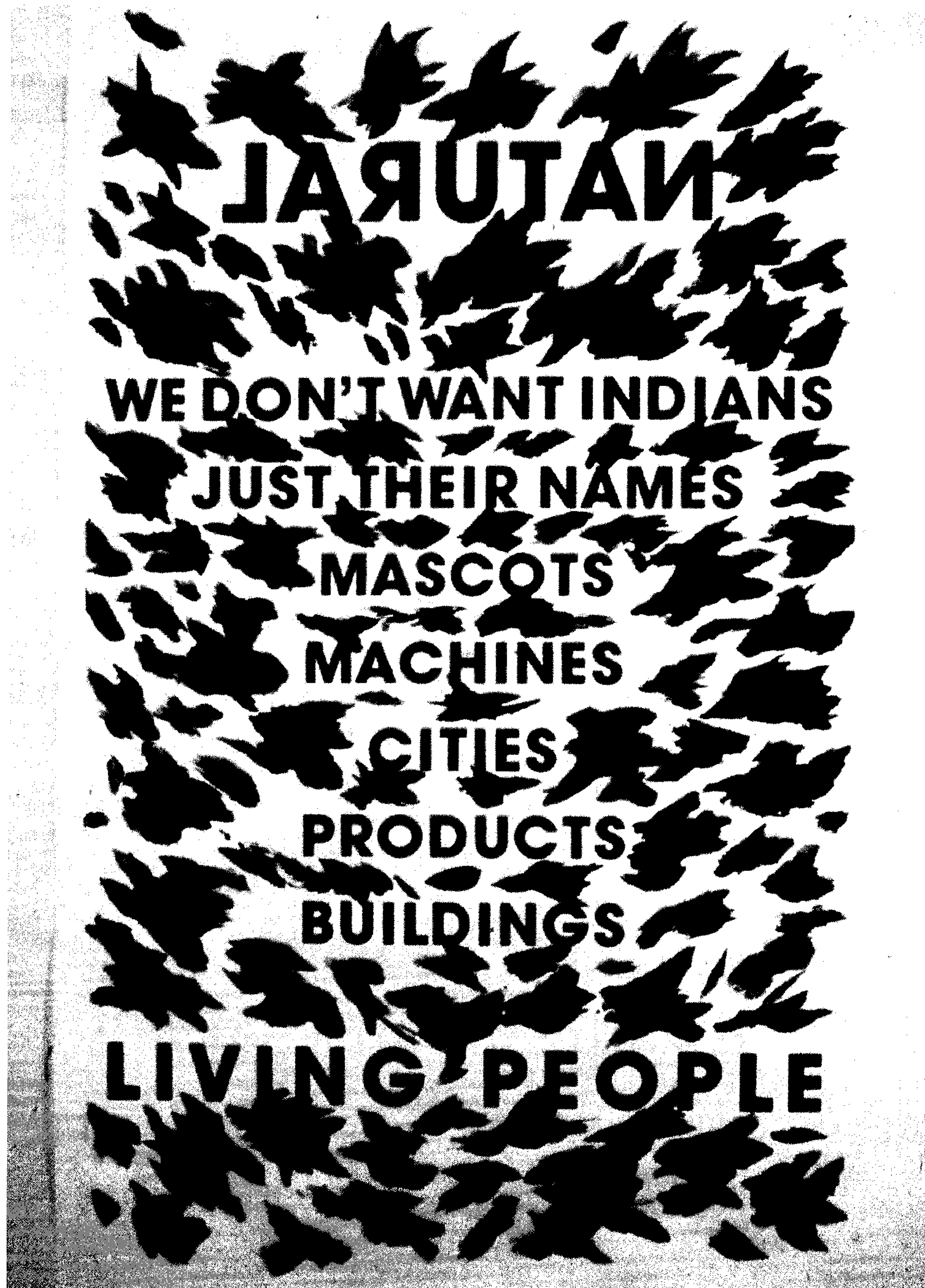

Figure 19. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Telling Many Magpies, Telling Black Wolf, Telling Hachivi*, screen print, 42 x 60", 1989. Courtesy of the artist.

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exploitation by calling it "unnatural" to name things after Indian's such as mascots, machines, cities, products, and buildings.[117] Likewise, in "American Leagues," a billboard was used to protest the mascot of Major League Baseball's Cleveland Indians and was very effective in motivating the local urban tribal representatives to act as spokespeople for the cause when attempts at censorship failed (Fig. 20). In both cases, the point is made clear the extent to which American consumerist society is intent upon exploiting and appropriating the image of the Indian, for reasons whose origins are found in the idea of culture (discussed in the first chapter), while ignoring the serious problems that Native communities continue to experience.

Collective Memory as Institutional Critique: History and the Present

In a recent interview with geography professor Nick Blomley, Heap of Birds spoke about the uncompromising challenges that his artistic practices pose to the general public when viewers are confronted with (neo)colonial historical accounts of the contemporary realities of Native people in the Americas.[118] When asked, he explained that his work dealt directly with issues of colonial violence, displacement, and dispossession to allow "tribal community members, at those specific locations, to be able to interact with issues of Native culture," in the mainstream, by bringing the indigenous presence back to the lands and urban sites that were lost to white invasion.[119] Often, Heap of Birds' language installations are placed in urban sites, outdoors, and are free to

[117] Heap of Birds, interview by the author, 7 February 2007.
[118] Blomley, op cit., pp. 799-807.
[119] Ibid., p. 800.

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Figure 20. Edgar Heap of Birds, *American Leagues*, billboard, 8 x 16', Cleveland, Ohio, 1996. Courtesy of the artist.

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the public as a way to encourage Native and non-Native people alike to engage and question "official" histories formed either in the past or present.

For example, in the *Native Hosts* series, sign panels are utilized in their official-looking forms to mimic the authoritative power of public signs usually encountered by pedestrians on the streets or motorists on the highway (Figs. 21-23). The signs function in their "official" capacity to challenge passersby to question the integrity of the messages because, according to the artist, "people tend to believe a sign [so] I ask them to question other 'official' signs which they may see in the future [because] all signs, laws, and histories are editorials."[120] The *Native Host* series has been deployed in a few states including New York, Oregon, and Oklahoma, and the province of British Columbia, and take the same message to the public by containing the words of the "state or province [written backwards]/Today Your Host Is" and the name of a tribe located in that region (each sign has a different tribal name on it).

By writing the state backwards, Heap of Birds wants to emphasize the act of looking back into history to bring forth awareness regarding local Native histories and issues that have been forgotten, or else assimilated into grand historical narratives. In fact, the political efficacy of the site specific works is developed by a re-engagement with cultural and historical contexts anchored in the land of each region. For example, the twelve *Native Hosts* signs that encircled the Vancouver Art Gallery (Fig. 22) were meant to draw attention to the history of the gallery building (which used to be a provincial courthouse) as the site where legal proceedings determining ownership of indigenous

[120] Ibid., p. 802.

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Figure 21. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native Hosts*, series of 12 park signs including 6 censored signs, enamel on aluminum, commercial silkscreen printing, 18 x 36", installed New York's City Hall Park, 1988. Courtesy of the artist.

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Figure 22. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native Hosts*, series of 12 metal signs, vinyl on aluminum, 18 x 36", Vancouver Art Gallery, British Columbia, 1991. Courtesy of the artist.

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lands belonging to First Nations peoples took place. In another example, Heap of Birds addressed the theft of tribal lands with a metal sign titled *Reclaim*, which, ironically enough, is permanently located in Purchase, New York (Fig. 23). When describing the piece, the artist wonders if New York was rightfully purchased and, if so, where is the receipt? And if a receipt cannot be procured, is it then free to be rightfully reclaimed?[121]

The attention to historic events impacting contemporary Native life is brought to bear in other public projects that critique forms of institutional violence experienced at the political, cultural, social, and personal levels by tribal groups. Heap of Birds describes the attempt to address these concerns as a rare opportunity for Native people to comment on their own condition as opposed to "listening to members of the dominant culture explain what it is we are."[122] Often, the research that goes into developing a public project reveals traumatic events that have shaped the political and social injustices affecting reservation life today. Too often the historical record contains biased accounts of the past from predominantly Euro-American perspectives intent upon preserving ideological frameworks justifying white democratic institutions at the expense of Native lives. In her essay, "The Health of the People is the Highest Law," for the show *Re-visions* (1988) at the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff, Alberta, Fisher discusses the discrepancies between the roles of cultural institutions that sponsor Indian art exhibitions while, at the same time, continue to "sanction serious depredation against the well-being of Indian peoples."[123]

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[121] Heap of Birds, interview by the author, 7 February 2007.
[122] Heap of Birds, *Sharp Rocks*, p. 9.
[123] Jean Fisher, "The Health of the People is the Highest Law," in *Re-visions* (Alberta: The Banff Center,

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Figure 23. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Reclaim*, permanent sign panel, vinyl on aluminum, 56 x 72", Neuberger Museum of Art, Biennial Exhibition of Public Art, Purchase College, New York, 1997. Courtesy of the artist.

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Particularly, Fisher is speaking in line with the intention of *Re-visions* which was organized in part as a response to Calgary's Glenbow Museum exhibition *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* (1988). The Glenbow exhibition was organized by the ethnology department and was designed to "educate the Canadian people about the native heritage of their country and to bring the wealth of Canadian native materials held in foreign museums to light."[124] With over 650 Canadian native objects drawn largely from foreign collections, *The Spirit Sings* coincided with the Winter Olympics and was boycotted by various official organizations representing almost all Indian and Metis groups across Canada at the federal, provincial, and band levels.[125] At issue was corporate sponsorship of the *The Spirit Sings* by Shell Canada, an oil company that the Lubicon Cree Band from northern Alberta had been in a forty-year dispute with over the settlement of lands that would halt the encroachment of corporate interests on their land and economy.

Since 1939, the Lubicon have been fighting land claims with federal and provincial authorities over their legitimacy as a native band with all the rights to their traditional homelands. However, because they never negotiated or signed treaties with the government, they do not have a reserve and are not recognized as an autonomous community. Then, in the 1980s, the provincial government started allowing logging and oil drilling in the area causing all the traditional water sources to be contaminated while

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1992), pp. 35-44. Participants in the show included Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Jimmie Durham, Edgar Heap of Birds, Zacharias Kunuk, Mike MacDonald, Alan Michelson, Edward Poitras, and Pierre Sioui.

[124] Julia D. Harrison, "'The Spirit Sings' and the future of anthropology," *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 4, No. 6, December 1988, pp. 6-9.

[125] Bruce Trigger, "Reply to Julia Harrison's article "'The Spirit Sings' and the future of anthropology," *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 4, No. 6, December 1988, pp. 9-10.

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the machinery and new roads made trapping impossible. To this day, the government has not made any decisions regarding the Lubicon and the 400 or so members of the band are still living in abject poverty with no running water or sewer systems in their overcrowded houses.[126] While it was not the first time Native peoples had to join together in banning grand ethnographic shows declaring a "celebration of Native cultures" like *The Spirit Sings*, anthropologist Bruce Trigger focused on the broader issue of whether or not academics actually dealt with ethnic inequality and exploitation in Canadian society.[127] To him, the issue begged the question: "Who is to decide what is in the best interest of Native People: they themselves or paternalistic Euro-Canadians?"

Even though the Glenbow Museum proceeded with their show (declaring that the Lubicon had no business confusing politics with pleasure), national and international media attention brought to light what Fisher considered "the problems colonized peoples face in bearing witness to the injustice of this form of institutionalized violence, and the extent to which cultural institutions themselves are complicit with it through an insistence that culture remains outside political considerations."[128] In particular, Fisher examines the history of ethnographic displays as the product of institutional coding which defines objects with "explanatory" captions to inscribe and constitute meanings that relegate living Indian people to the historical museum as if they are extinct. For that reason, most ethnographic displays are devoid of contemporary issues, such as land rights and basic survival, because "in the world of exotic signs one can experience the romance of the

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[126] Andrew Hanon, "The Stewardship of their Traditional Land is a Sacred Trust; COMMUNITIES THREATENED: Not everyone shares burden," *Edmonton Sun*, 26 November 2006, p. 21.
[127] Trigger, op cit.
[128] Fisher, "The Health of the People is the Highest Law," p. 35.

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frontier and the frisson of danger, with none of its uncomfortable reality."[129] And, above all, the emphasis on ethnographic arts "throws a veil over the reality of Native Americans" as living people with self-determination.

In his piece for *Re-visions*, Heap of Birds offered his own assessment of the Lubicon's situation with a billboard that read "Imperial Canada Doesn't Make Indians Native People Recognize Themselves" (Fig. 24). By placing the billboard atop the roof of the gallery, it was Heap of Birds' contention that Canadian law reflected a racist-imperial nation that took upon itself the outrageous privilege of determining who shall be considered Native in a land where the national lawmakers are immigrants.[130] Similarly, Fisher makes the argument that all colonized people are continuing to be subjugated by the principles of western democracies which claim to be guardians of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in which all are deemed equal before the law. However, in the colonial discourse, human suffrage applies only to those whom the institution of law acknowledges as fully human. As Fisher astutely points out, "what characterizes the fully human in white culture is 'whiteness,' a purely visual and abstract way of categorizing humankind, to which is attached a large body of moral, scientific, economic, and political justifications."[131] And, as witnesses to the violation of the law, the Native American voice makes visible what in white democratic institutions never appears but which is constantly proclaimed—the structure of the law.[132]

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[129] Ibid., pp. 40-41.
[130] Edgar Heap of Birds, "Artist Statement," in *Re-visions* (Alberta: The Banff Center, 1992), p. 12.
[131] Fisher, "The Health of the People is the Highest Law," p. 37.
[132] Ibid.

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Figure 24. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Imperial Canada*, billboard, 18 x 6', Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Alberta, 1988. Courtesy of the artist.

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As a way to make visible these violations of the law, Heap of Birds finds that artworks concerning traumatic histories and events are most effective when erected at prominent museum venues because they establish a forum for all to acknowledge the ongoing brutality and intolerance permeating ethical and social life in America. For the project *Building Minnesota* (1990), forty signs were placed along the Mississippi River in Minneapolis to honor the forty Dakota tribal citizens executed by order of Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson in 1862 and 1865 (Fig. 25). Considered America's largest mass execution, the memorial to the forty Dakota warriors was commissioned by the Walker Art Center and installed along the West River Parkway in a four-hundred foot arc that contained the name of each warrior (Fig. 26).

The events surrounding their death allude to the U.S.-Dakota conflict which was fought along the banks of the Minnesota River in the summer of 1862. The conflict is linked directly to the expansion of white settlements into the Minnesota River Valley during the 1850s when treaties were signed that mandated the relocation of Dakota people onto reservations.[133] Essentially, the U.S. government did not honor the terms of the treaty that prescribed food allotments to the Dakota people which were warehoused near the reservation. The storehouse manager would not release the rations to the tribe (whom he told to eat grass instead) until he was paid by the U.S. government, which was unable to do so since it was overwhelmed by the Civil War. After near starvation, the tribe seized the storehouse, killed the manager, and placed grass in his mouth.[134]

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[133] Joan Rothfuss, "Building Minnesota," catalogue brochure, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1990.
[134] Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, "Heads Above Grass," in Anthony Kiendl, ed., *Obsession, Compulsion, Collection: On Objects, Display Culture, and Interpretation* (Canada: Banff Centre Press, 2004), p. 211.

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Figure 25. **Edgar Heap of Birds, *Building Minnesota*, four hundred foot forty sign panel installation on the banks of the Mississippi River and West River Parkway, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1990. Courtesy of the artist.**

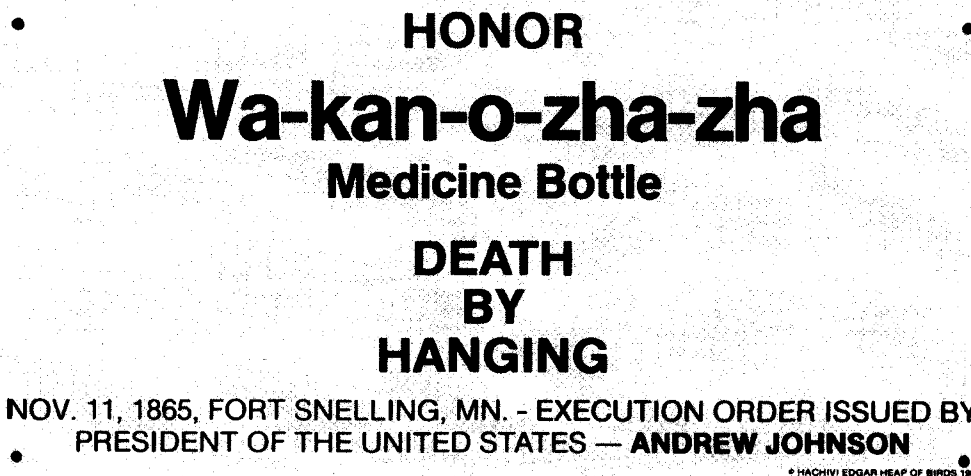

Figure 26. **Edgar Heap of Birds, *Building Minnesota*, detail, four hundred foot forty sign panel installation on the banks of the Mississippi River and West River Parkway, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1990. Courtesy of the artist.**

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The placement of the forty signs by the river in the city's historic granary district, where both Pillsbury and Gold Medal have towering grain elevators, was twofold. First, Heap of Birds wanted to critique the commercial enterprise of the townspeople whose main source of income was developed through transport of grains on the Mississippi River. This fact led Heap of Birds to comment on the historic relocation of the Dakota tribe to reservations as a calculated move on the part of white settlers to secure Dakota tribal homelands for their own economic benefit. As curator Joan Rothfuss indicated in the brochure, "in *Building Minnesota* the execution of forty men one hundred twenty-eight years ago is linked to Native people's ongoing struggle for land rights, and thus to a respect for the earth that is traditional in Native culture."[135] Second, the significance of placing the memorial near the water was a reference to ceremonial practices that involve fasting and foregoing water in a kind of self-sacrifice that the Dakota warriors would have endured for the benefit of their tribe.

Heap of Birds maintains that the memorial panels were inspired by contemporary Minnesota folk singer Larry Long and Dakota tribal elder Amos Owen and was supported and installed by some descendants of the forty executed Dakota warriors (Fig. 27).[136] Local Native citizens often came to the site of the memorial (which stood for one year) to tie ceremonial offerings to the panels in a manner that Heap of Birds thought invoked a sense of healing by honoring the warriors' memory with the renewing effects of water as a life-giving force in the community. In addition, the use of the color red in the signs was deliberate in its symbolic referencing of life, or renewal, since it variously

[135] Rothfuss, op cit.
[136] Heap of Birds, "Heads Above Grass," p. 211.

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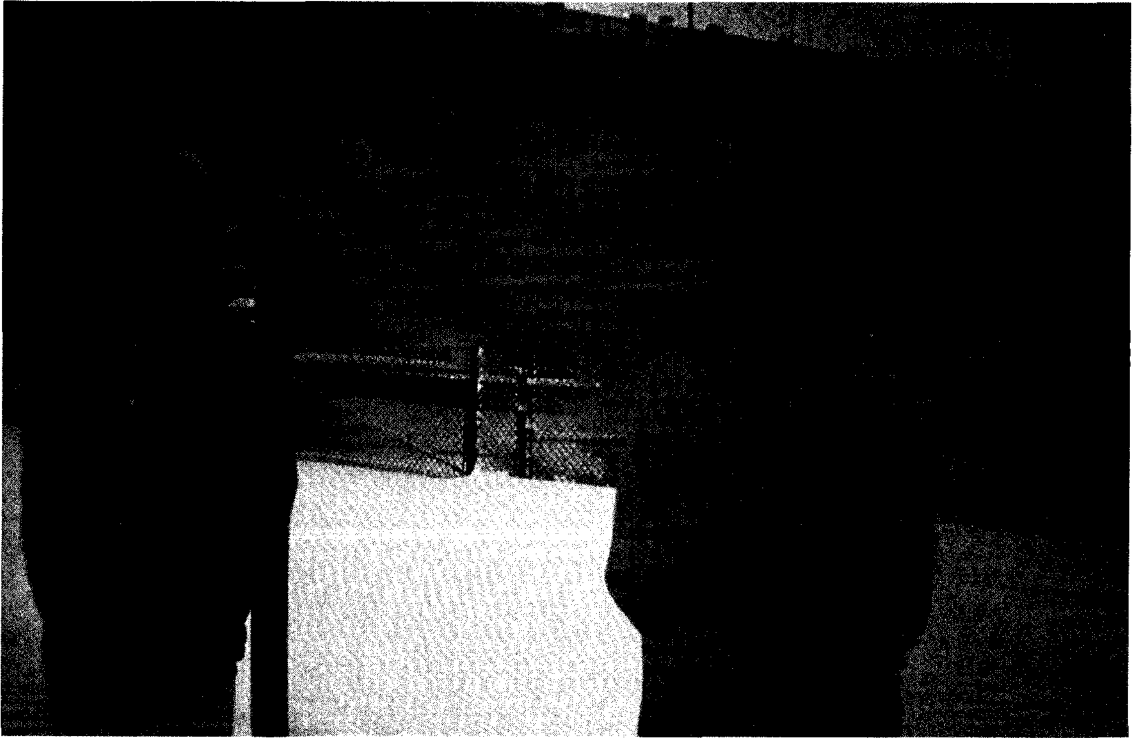

Figure 27. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Building Minnesota*, four hundred foot forty sign panel installation on the banks of the Mississippi River and West River Parkway, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1990. Courtesy of the artist.

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suggests the color of blood, the color of the Indian ("Red Man") and the color of the earth/sand in Oklahoma.[137]

The importance of "place" in Heap of Birds' work is reiterated by all of these personal notions that the land encompasses for the Cheyenne and other Plains tribes located east of the Rocky Mountains, well into Canada. However, as a concept, the positive aspects of the land that relate ceremony and plant life also evoke the treaties, wars, massacres, government policies, or other memories in history. For Heap of Birds, having such a personal and emotional commitment to place is a conceptual state that is under the constant threat from feelings of displacement caused by the brutalities that Native peoples have suffered since colonization and forced relocation.[138] Perhaps, for the artist, this idea is best exemplified in the language installation, "Death from the Top" (Fig. 28), where thoughts on the massacre of the Cheyenne Nation at Washita River (1868) are displayed in painted die-cut letters on a wall in the Brooklyn military terminal for the exhibition *Preparing for War, Terminal New York* (1983). And it reads:

> Western, Living, Hemisphere, Washita River Nov 27, 1868, Death From The Top, Forget, Forgot, Sleeping Children, Running Children, Murdered In The Water, Find My People, Kill My People, Proud Brave Brutality, Dominate, Relocate, Destroy, Moving Against Earth.

The words in the installation seek to comment on the legacy of both the Sand Creek (1864) and Washita River (1868) massacres on the Cheyenne Nation today which, because of subsequent retaliations by the tribe against oppression, resulted in the

[137] The word Oklahoma combines two Choctaw words: 'ukla ("person") and huma ("red"); thus, Oklahoma means "red person." The word Oklahoma first appears in the 1866 Choctaw-Chickasaw Treaty and was coined by Choctaw preacher and Chief Allen Wright (1826-1885).
[138] Blomley, op cit., p. 799.

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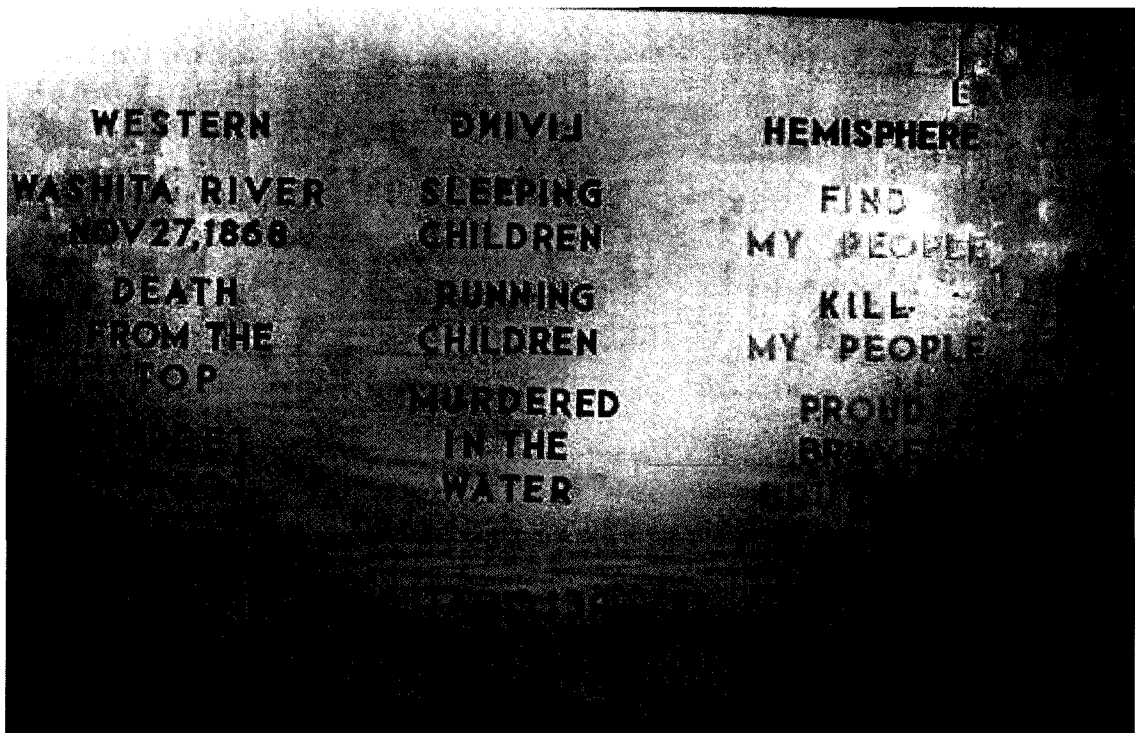

Figure 28. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Death From The Top*, painted die-cut letters, language installation, 10 x 20 feet, Brooklyn military terminal, New York, 1983. Courtesy of the artist.

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struggles "of an untold number of socioeconomic and mental hardships facilitated by the removal and incarceration of tribal chiefs and warrior society members to Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Florida, as prisoners of war."[139] The different colored letters are used to indicate the emotional and psychological differences between the Native peoples and their enemies and the words that refer to these distinctions.[140] For example, the pink colored words reference the color of Anglo-American skin while also alluding to the "pink, cool and uncaring attitude that the majority of America feels toward the serious crises that face American Indians today."[141] Likewise, the black lettered words, "dominate" and "destroy," are associated with the enemies while "earth" and "moving" as Native associations are painted in red;[142] and the yellow-green color of "western" and "hemisphere" give the sense of the living, vital and growing American Indian.[143]

Heap of Birds draws from the descriptions of a fourteen-year-old Cheyenne girl named Moving Behind who happened to survive the attack by Colonel George Custer's army on the sleeping Cheyenne camp of mostly women, children, and elderly people at Washita River. In her memory of that day, Moving Behind recounts how she and others fled to a nearby hill and hid in the grass until the noise dissipated and she raised her head only to see the horrific sights of the violence put upon the defenseless women and children. To this day, memorial dances are held by Cheyenne communities every year,

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[139] Heap of Birds, "Heads Above Grass," p. 210. The artist is a great great grandson of one of the prisoners of war, the Cheyenne Chief Many Magpies (Mo-E-Yau-Hay-Ist) who was incarcerated at Fort Marion and died there of unknown causes on October 7, 1877.
[140] Lowery Stokes Sims, "Words Into Vision: The Art of Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds," in *Claim Your Color*, catalogue, (New York: Exit Art, 1990), p. 8.
[141] Heap of Birds, *Sharp Rocks*, p. 6.
[142] Sims, op cit., p. 8.
[143] Heap of Birds, *Sharp Rocks*, p. 6.

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whose descendants of the massacre at Washita River and the prisoners of war at Fort Marion do not forget what happened to their people.

"In Our Language": Self-Location and Personal Transformation

As a traditional headsman of the Cheyenne Elk Warrior society, Heap of Birds has vowed to carry tribal members (both young and old) upon his back as symbolic of his dedication and responsibilities in Cheyenne social and religious spheres.[144] It is a role he takes very seriously because the position requires leadership for the contemporary survival and future strength of the tribe. In addition to participating/dancing in the earth renewal ceremonies every summer (he has danced thirteen times), Heap of Birds often recollects the numerous times he has attended funerals back home on the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation. It is a memory that places him sharply in contrast to the dominant white culture in America by revealing what, exactly, it means to be Indian:

> The warriors and chiefs are asked to support the families of the deceased. We offer them a positive force in their worst of all days. During the burial service, as I walk down the line of family members touching the hand of each grieving person, their powerful pain is shared with me. Too often the cause of death is a broken heart or broken spirit . . . Today the criterion of Indianness is suffering the pain of our culture, which is experienced in our traditional way "together." A true Indian cannot claim to be Native one day and not Native the next. The mark of being of the Native experience cannot be measured by a blood fraction.[145]

The Native experience, as one that cannot be measured by a blood fraction, is a theme that Heap of Birds has engaged in his work over the years. The quote above

[144] Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, "Artist's Statement," brochure for exhibition *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes A Man)*, Matt's Gallery, London (28 October-6 November 1989).
[145] Edgar Heap of Birds, "Artist's Statement," in *Nah-Kev-Ho-Eyea-Zim* (*We Are Always Turning Around...On Purpose*), Amelie A. Wallace Gallery, State University of New York College at Old Westbury, Long Island, New York (8 April-8 May 1986), p. 14. Other participants included Jimmie Durham, G. Peter Jemison, Jean Lamarr, Jolene Rickard, and Richard Ray (Whitman).

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comes from an artist's statement for the exhibition *We Are Always Turning Around...On Purpose* (1986) and refers to the claims that Anglo-American people make about having any remote blood-line reference to the effect of: "I am part Indian. I believe that my great, great-grandmother, or was it my grandfather; well, one them was full-blooded Cherokee."[146] Heap of Birds questions the motives of the person who wants to be Indian because the role entails responsibilities such as leading or engaging the tribal community, sacrificing oneself in the ceremonies and continuous care-taking of the people. In his piece, "Native Is Pain and You're Part?," Heap of Birds comments on the willingness of the white person to share in the values and cosmos of the Native person; however, a reciprocal relationship is never formed where the white person is willing to share their privileges with Indians (Fig. 29). In many respects, his critiques of the mass media with works like "Telling Many Magpies, Telling Black Wolf, Telling Hachivi," and "American Leagues" (Figs. 19 and 20), are developed from this point of view that Indians are expected to share their gifts of earth awareness (and everything else), while privileges reserved for white culture in America (such as adequate education, job skills, medical treatment, health, food sources, and proper housing) are kept off limits.

By engaging these types of contrasts in Native cultural identity/community and those of Western culture, Heap of Birds began his assault on what he terms the "problem of rhetoric," or language, in representing contemporary Indian life. To him, the dominant white culture was too busy defining what Indians ought to be, or ought to be doing, so that he thought of presenting his own position which would, ultimately, merge his

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[146] Ibid.

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NATIVE IS PAIN AND YOU'RE PART?

Figure 29. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native is Pain* (original version painted die-cut letters, 34" x 24"), 1985. Courtesy of the artist.

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reverence for the tribal with the artistic/media practices he learned from a formal education. In his piece titled "In Our Language," Heap of Birds utilizes the Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) language to define himself and the white man (Vehoe) using text as visual elements to confront the suppression of Native voices in the mainstream (Fig. 30). The piece was sponsored by the Public Art Fund as part of the exhibition *Messages to the Public* (1982) in which young, up-and-coming artists of the 1980s, including Keith Haring, David Hammonds, and Jenny Holzer, displayed their work on a spectacolor computer light billboard in Times Square, New York. Heap of Birds' piece ran for three weeks in October every twenty minutes for fifty seconds at a time. The impact of the messages was felt especially by Native American artists because it was the first time they had seen someone address the New York art world from that position. In the words of Jimmie Durham (Cherokee), "I first heard his [Heap of Birds'] name after walking along Times Square and being astounded to see that the giant computerized electronic billboard was carrying a Cheyenne message to Manhattan."[147] The wide-reaching appeal of "In Our Language" is often credited with most directly addressing the hegemony of Western art over representation and the United States' preoccupation with myths and stereotypes that produce distorted images of the Native American population.

Taking his cue from these historical errors, Heap of Birds actively set out, as a point of departure from his public work, to exercise and develop his own identity as a Native man in America. In the exhibition *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes*

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[147] Jimmie Durham, "Ni' Go Tlunh A Doh Ka (We Are Always Turning Around on Purpose)," in *We Are Always Turning Around... On Purpose*, Amelie A. Wallace Gallery, State University of New York College at Old Westbury, Long Island, New York (8 April-8 May 1986), p. 3.

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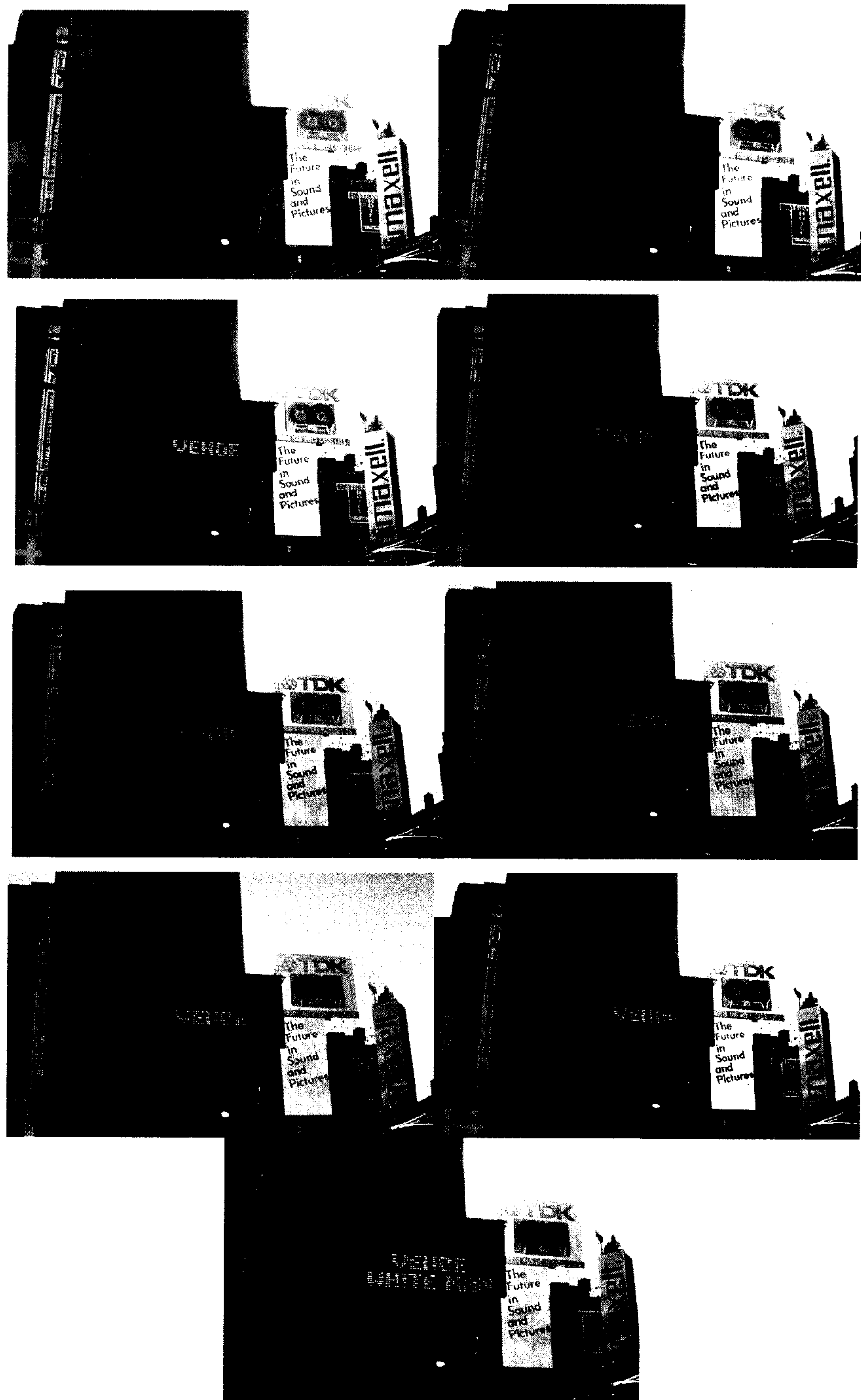

Figure 30. Edgar Heap of Birds, *In Our Language*, Spectacolor Computer Light Billboard (read from left to right), Times Square, New York, 1982. Courtesy of the artist.

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A Man) (1987), the artist felt compelled to articulate ideas concerning the subject of Native men and the personal politics of manhood in order to deepen and broaden those definitions.[148] By presenting works on canvas and paper, Heap of Birds expressed the need to "open Native artistic endeavors to the issue of sexuality so that public recognition of Native people as *individuals* [emphasis his]" would commence. To him, the absence of references to sex in the work of many Native artists was a failure to express truthfully a type of modern sexual reality that, when finally addressed, could, perhaps, spoil the image of so-called purity inherent to America's "noble savage."[149] As Fisher noted in her review of *What Makes A Man* at the American Indian Community House Gallery (1987), Western cultural male identity had always been defined in terms of relations of power that circulated around gender and cultural difference to "prove" the inferiority of women and others as the "natural" order of things.[150]

The image that Heap of Birds presented was not tied to the victimized Indian position that he believes liberal white America is always looking for; neither was he trying to portray the stereotypical image of male Indianness that has permeated both mainstream and indigenous cultural media. For Heap of Birds, the personal expressions made in *What Makes A Man* were pivotal toward transforming the dialogue concerning people of color having the right to invent their own lives. The important thing, to the artist, was to explore his own persona as an individual so that the creative process was

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[148] Heap of Birds, "Artist's Statement," *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes A Man)*. The show was exhibited in New York, Massachusetts, Texas, and England (1987-1988).
[149] Ibid.
[150] Jean Fisher, "Edgar Heap of Birds: *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes A Man)*," *Art Forum International*, Vol. 26, No. 5, January 1988, p. 116.

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not always about relating "to the white man or the [politics] of one's own culture."[151] What his works demonstrated, instead, was an introspective, almost poetic response to social issues in contrast to the didactic political art that people were used to seeing.[152] It also proved a point concerning the role of multicultural rhetoric and diversity issues as a discourse bent on reducing an individual to identity without regard for their changing positions which might be plural, mobile, or strategic.[153]

In the exhibition, Heap of Birds combined four Neuf paintings and four composite language drawings that address an aspect of his life (Figs. 31 and 32). The title of the paintings "Neuf" means the number four in the Cheyenne language and refers to the ceremonial practice of doing important actions four times.[154] The pastel drawings are grouped together in one set of fifteen three-word phrases that embody a common theme such as "Self," "Sexual," "Tribal Warrior," and "Boy-Woman-Family." The paintings themselves have narrative titles such as "Sweat Lodge Fire—Lava Rock," "They Built a Fire in Summer," "The Circle Was Hot," and "Old Man Sat Calm Near the Heat." Heap of Birds claimed that he wanted to describe a full view of the world concerning both the positive and negative relationships that shape human experience:

> From both a personal and tribal identity I have chosen to comment with two forms of expression. The Neuf paintings have come from the old home-place in Oklahoma. Over many years of walking and watching in the out-of-doors, the images of movement, color, pulse, and celebration have become an

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[151] Lawrince Rinder, exhibition essay, *Is What Is*, University Art Museum, Berkeley, California, January-April 1992.
[152] Brian Wallis, "'Will/Power' at the Wexner Center," *Art in America*, Vol. 81, No. 2, February 1993, p. 116.
[153] Fisher, "New Contact Zones," p. 45. In her discussion of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, Fisher thinks postcolonial diasporan debates about cultural hybridity offer little to the contemporary indigenous subject whose chosen positions may be more tactical than ambivalent.
[154] Edgar Heap of Birds, interview by the author, electronic mail, Albuquerque, NM., 11 November 2004.

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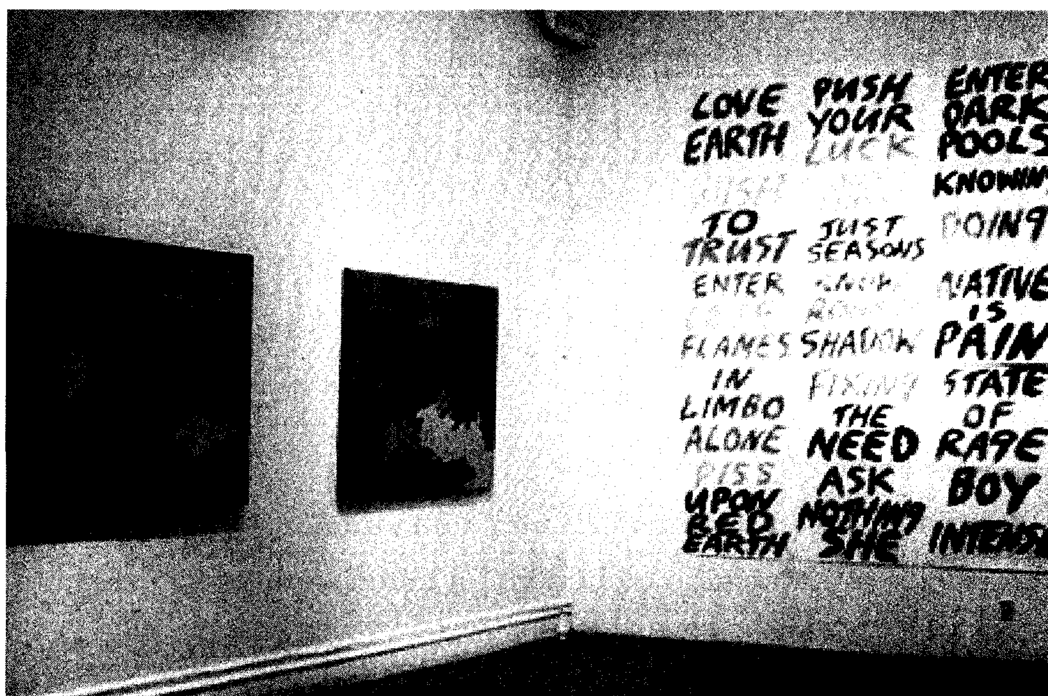

Figure 31. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes A Man)*, installation view (Neuf series, acrylic on canvas 56 x 64", "Self" pastel on rag paper 90 x 60"), American Indian Community House Gallery, New York, 1988. Courtesy of the artist.

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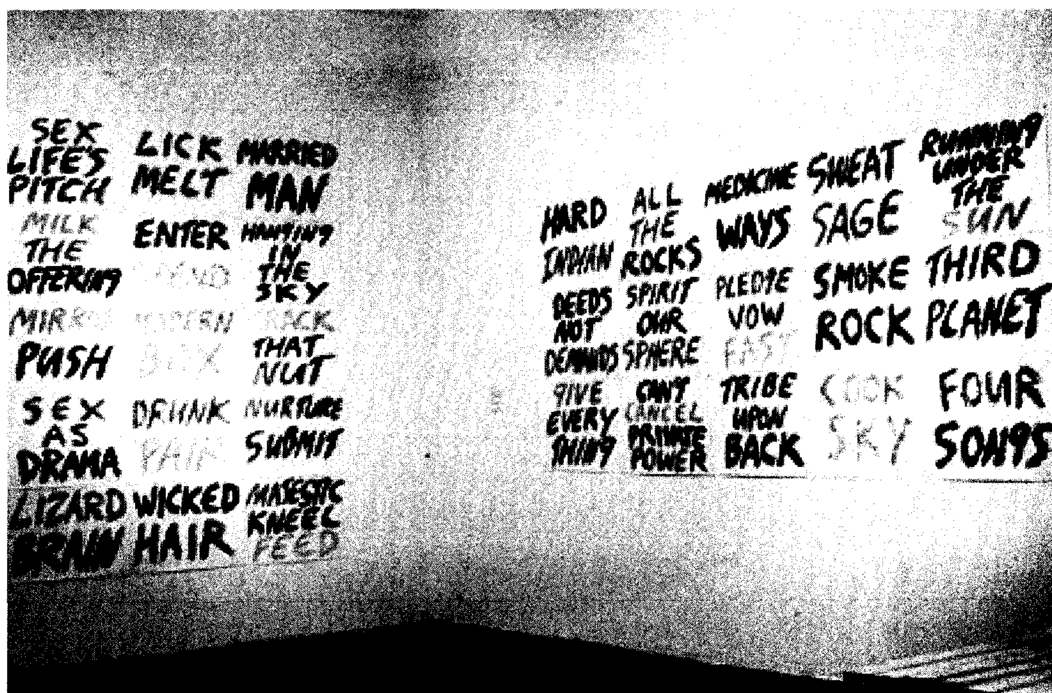

Figure 32. Edgar Heap of Birds, Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes A Man), installation view ("Sexual" and "Tribal Warrior"), American Indian Community House Gallery, New York, 1988. Courtesy of the artist.

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> evolving visual language. These four painted works seek to project the understanding that the world, as witnessed from the sage, cedar, and red canyon, is a lively and replenishing place.[155]

The paintings form the psychological backdrop for the second form of expression: the word drawings, or wall lyrics, which portray a range of emotions including love, hate, dominance, nurturing, growth, death, loneliness, and leadership.[156] The artist is quick to point out that the words come out of very direct experiences that could have been long sentences but are edited down to be shorter. Each letter is made from quick strokes of the pastel on rag paper usually with up to five different colors impressed on top of the other. When grouped together in one large piece, the three-word phrases become memory fragments consolidated to make language appear dynamic and open to change, "as if words themselves were vulnerable to the transforming forces of nature."[157] Indeed, the colors and movement inherent to the Neuf paintings are echoed in the wall lyrics as they, too, are presented as images. Later, the wall lyrics are written on huge sheets of rag paper with black marker and exhibited alongside the Neuf paintings (Figs. 33 and 34).

Heap of Birds credits living on his home place, in a rural area of Oklahoma on the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation, with allowing him to paint the Neuf series which, in his own words, "gave my life direction."[158] According to the artist, trying to find the Neuf series defines a difficult and frustrating time in his life when attempts at trying to paint the earth were challenging because he had never lived on the reservation for any length of time. After growing up in Wichita, Kansas and then receiving formal training

[155] Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, "Artist's Statement," in *Land Spirit Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, Ottawa, 25 September-22 November 1992, p. 149.
[156] Heap of Birds, "Artist's Statement," *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes A Man).*
[157] Rinder, *Is What Is.*
[158] Heap of Birds, interview by the author, 7 February 2007. Early paintings were also titled "Neva" series.

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Figure 33. Edgar Heap of Birds, *The Allure*, marker on rag paper, 6.5 x 11', 1994. Courtesy of the artist.

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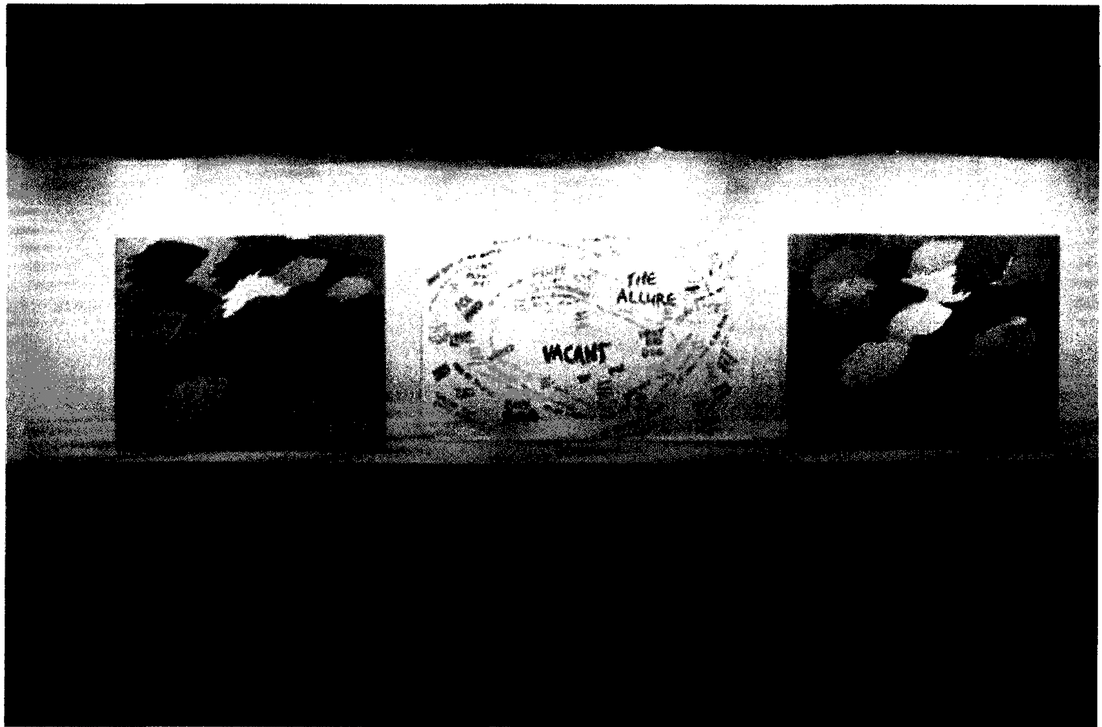

Figure 34. Edgar Heap of Birds, *16 Songs* installation view (Neuf paintings and *The Allure*), The University of North Texas Art Gallery, Denton, Texas, 1995. Courtesy of the artist.

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in studio art at the University of Kansas, Heap of Birds went on to graduate studies in painting at both the Royal College of Art in London and the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. As an artist trained specifically as a painter, Heap of Birds found solace in the small red rock canyon near his home where he set up his easel and tried to overcome personal struggles related to coming home, as it were, to a strange place. In his own words:

> ...I was just trying to fit in. I didn't know what to do. It was hard, you know. It wasn't like you come home and everyone pats you on the back and welcomes you back. It was all kinds of personal struggles, so all I could think to do was take a little canvas down to the red rock and paint just to see if it could help me. And it did. But it took a long time...it didn't happen in six months. I painted a lot of bad paintings but, eventually, it led me to the Neuf Series.[159]

The first painting came at dusk in the canyon in 1981 (Fig. 35) and was modest in size (about eight by ten inches) compared to recent paintings that reach seven by eight feet. Although the first painting was executed in the canyon, subsequent paintings are done in the studio often with rock music blaring in his earphones. Often, the Neuf series is described as landscape painting but Heap of Birds points out that the images are informed by the canyon and trees and that he only painted that one outside and brought it back into the studio. Since then the paintings have formed a whole language of their own to represent a positive realm where they seem to be leading the artist, instead of the other way around, as life also evolves and changes. Heap of Birds describes the flatness of the shapes as deliberate because he wants to emphasize the act of looking, or seeing, that is inherent to the human eye witnessing a spectacle, or vision, such as the clouds moving

[159] Ibid.

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Figure 35. Edgar Heap of Birds, Untitled (Neva/Neuf Series), acrylic on canvas, 8 x 10", 1981. Courtesy of the artist.

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by, fish moving past, or trees swaying in the wind.[160] He also notices changes in the shapes themselves, over the years, as becoming more definitive in outline and also originating from left to right as if moving by like a school of fish (Fig. 36). The colors have also gotten brighter as Heap of Birds started adding white paint to each solid color while also experimenting with the interactions of color.[161] Every shape is also realized in its entirety so that the finished product bears a canvas with layers upon layers of shapes.

Heap of Birds lived near the small red rock canyon for twelve years, becoming a "student of the canyon" where he hiked and hunted everyday whether it was twenty degrees or one hundred degrees.[162] When talking about the experience, the artist often equates his success with the Neuf series as comparable to growing more and more comfortable with the earth. However, the Neuf series also indicates the ceremonial aspect of Heap of Birds' life and finds a literal referent, not only in the title, but in the fact that he tries to paint four works at a time as well as exhibit the work in four museums or in four directions. The number four is indicative of how the Cheyenne handle the sacred movements during ceremonial practices where there are four songs sung four times and the multiple of four equals sixteen, another important number for the artist.[163] In addition, the flatness of the paintings is conducive to a Cheyenne traditional perspective of the world where the articulation of flatness finds a referent in the

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[160] Ibid.

[161] Heap of Birds consulted Josef Albers' study of the *Interaction of Color* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963).

[162] Heap of Birds, interview by the author, 11 November 2004.

[163] Ibid. Heap of Birds put together an important exhibition titled *16 Song/Issues of Personal Assessment and Indigenous Renewal* (1995) where he traveled to the Tandanya Aboriginal Center, Adelaide, Australia, and Boomalli Aboriginal Artist's Co-operative, Sydney, Australia, and collaborated with contemporary aboriginal artists. The artists responded to sixteen word concepts derived from the Cheyenne earth renewal ceremony and the resulting artwork traveled around America to five major venues.

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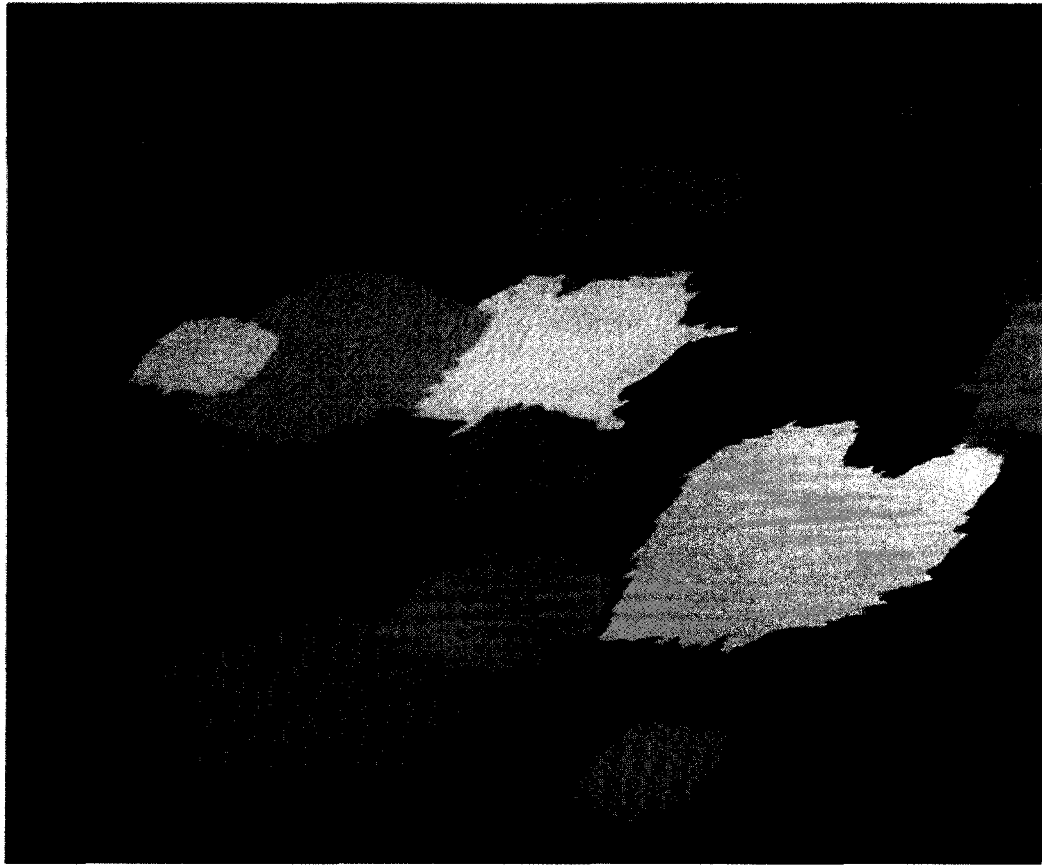

Figure 36. Edgar Heap of Birds, Untitled (Neuf Series), acrylic on canvas, 89 x 105", 1997. Courtesy of the artist.

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geometric shapes beaded onto cloth or hide and worn on the body. It also extends to the medicine images that are painted on the body during the renewal ceremony which are rendered flat and symbolic. To Heap of Birds, all these aspects of ceremonial life are observed in his paintings as they seek to project a celebratory image of life springing from the earth like an offering, every year promising revitalization and renewal (Fig. 37).

According to Mann, this sacred relationship with the earth accounts for the survival of Indian culture and the continuous struggles that Native people endure to protect the collective cultural and spiritual memory of indigenous life-ways in American society. Heap of Birds describes finding the Neuf Series as the beginning of the foundation of his entire artistic practice which can be characterized as a complementary relationship between his public/political and private/expressive art endeavors. Most of his works evoke a strong sense of homeland and a worldview that extends from a circular awareness of the earth and a respect for all Indian nations as sovereign entities. Operating from a position rooted in the land/earth, Heap of Birds advances cultural interventions at particular sites of power in the mainstream in order to effect cultural change, or forms of social justice. In that way, Heap of Birds demonstrates an aesthetic education rooted in the landscape with a commitment to preserving ties between land, culture, and community.

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Figure 37. Edgar Heap of Birds, Untitled (Neuf Series), acrylic on canvas, 36 x 42", 1997. Courtesy of the artist.

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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The contemporary Native American art scene recently engaged its diametrically-opposed constituent (the "mainstream") on the international art front in a move that sought to challenge the latter's penchant toward a narrow conception of global cultural relations.[164] With multiculturalist rhetoric serving as the complex backdrop for aspirations and desires, the boundaries between and among these two communities marked and constructed the differences that continue to pervade their relation to one another. As a highly visible social and cultural institution, la Biennale di Venezia provided a site whereby its exclusionary practices could be examined and critically reevaluated, in an intellectual project, to highlight Native American artistic and curatorial practices in the United States and abroad.

What seemed to be at stake, considering the titles of both symposiums, *Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon* (headed by Robert Storr, incoming director for the 2007 Venice Biennale) and *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity*, organized by the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), were issues of cultural production and the relations of power that determine meaning and, to a large extent, exchange value. A sense of displacement

[164] This discussion of NMAI's conference in Venice, Italy draws from my essay "Transgressing the 'National': Metaphors of Emancipation," in *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* (Washington, DC and New York: National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution, 2006), pp. 160-162.

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permeated the meeting grounds—an international venue that required travel from most of its participants—and forged a politics of space that often accompanies the process of globalization and informs international relations.

Native America's migration toward the international, as signaled by NMAI's endeavors at the Venice Biennale, can be seen as a form of global social criticism[165] in its efforts to locate culturally hybrid art forms within and beyond its own social and cultural spheres or traditions. In this way, we begin to see *culture*, in hybrid terms, as open-ended and constantly reimagined in a space where border identities are transgressed in order to pave the way toward renewed concepts and cultural transformations. In fact, the achievement of a non-Eurocentric conceptualization of multicultural relations depends upon a critical engagement with structural inequalities if the risks of homogenization of Native American experiences are to be overcome. To be sure, this collective effort to move beyond the local, or national, engenders a space of colonial encounter, known as the "contact zone," where knowledge of and action toward the "Other" have historically translated into convictions of inferiority and assimilation of subordinated cultures.[166]

This comparativist stance toward the "Other" privileges one's own cultural categories and denies the internal multiplicity of the hybrid in a process that empowers the imperial and impedes critical self-reflection. Todorov defines this ethnological moment as a "double movement" in which the possibility of recognizing the "Other" as both different *and* equal is precluded at the outset. For scholar Jean Fisher, it describes

[165] The term "global social criticism" is used in terms of international theory's use of a postcolonial approach toward international relations. See Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).
[166] This construction of the relation of self to other is discussed by Tzvetan Todorov, foreword by Anthony Pagden, in *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1999).

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the West's failure to engage in a dialogue of equality and relinquish its control over meaning production as it constantly re-centers itself as the privileged subject of knowledge.[167]

Critical engagement with the "mainstream" thus entails a rereading of hybridity as a space in and through which Natives can voice their own subjectivity by locating their cultural poetics as a politics that calls into question structural inequalities within the art world. This intervention would mean foregoing any desire to measure success in terms of recognition of and by the "mainstream" so that risks of the "double movement" of which Todorov speaks would be deflected. In fact, this typical response to domination describes an effort by the subordinated person to establish mutual relationships in a contact zone where recovery of the self often means a simultaneous loss of the self. Scholar Geeta Kapur questions this method of engaging the mainstream because even if the center-periphery model is turned inside out, the positions might change but the model that keeps it in place would not.[168]

Instead, a dialogue that contributes to the reciprocal illumination of one culture by the other is needed from both sides. Not only does this stance offer a way to negotiate the psychology of colonialism inherent to the contact zone, where hierarchies are invoked for domination, but it also situates the Native American subject as an effective agent employing a politics of resistance that avoids assimilation and cultivates self-worth. In fact, a redefinition of cultural hybridity at home is essential to the critical project because

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[167] Jean Fisher, "Editor's Note," *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London: Kala Press, 1994), p. x-xiv.
[168] Geeta Kapur, "A New Inter Nationalism: The Missing Hyphen," in Jean Fisher, ed., *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London: Kala Press, 1994), pp. 39–49.

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the Native American experience in the United States is still shaped by a mythical, nationalistic discourse conceding a substantial amount of historical amnesia concerning its relationship to indigenous populations. It is a condition whereby cultural hybridity is theorized as a metaphor for national sovereignty as differences become reified and power and social inequalities erased, thereby limiting the potential of hybrid social forms and movements to seriously challenge structural inequalities. Indeed, what becomes germane to the discussion, in the quest for visibility on the international art scene, is that one's own reading of the colonial character of the contact zone informs the efforts made toward reimagining one's own relationship to the mainstream. When this stance is taken and deployed as a challenge to neo-colonial oppression both at home and abroad, the contact zone ceases to engender the will to dominate and, instead, offers a vision of liberation for all those involved.

As a form of resistance, post-colonial critiques of modernism have done much to further studies into culture theory by engaging a critique of origins to destabilize hegemonic ideologies that maintain white intellectual supremacy over the academic field of art history. In fact, for the past thirty years, the field of art history has shifted its focus away from previously held assumptions that art somehow represents the embodiment or concretization of basic values and fundamental truths that exist somewhere outside of history, beyond social mutation, and external to political and economic reality.[169] The proliferation of thinkers who observed this paradigm shift were, in large part, signaled by the discipline of cultural studies whose questioning of the aesthetic meant contending

[169] Kenneth Coutts-Smith, "Cultural Colonialism" in *Third Text*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, 2002, p. 2. Article originally published in *Black Phoenix*, No. 2, Summer 1978 (forerunner of *Third Text*).

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with literary and artistic bodies of knowledge that operated on a continuum that disregarded all remnants of the social and political in its dynamics (especially those of outside cultures). It was to that body of knowledge that some postmodern thinkers began an interrogation of the aesthetic in an effort to critically address and challenge its ahistorical foundations. Consequently, this provocative mode of inquiry has been credited with instituting a fundamental critique of modern culture that is accused of, among other things, "showing that there is nothing in poetry or art that can be dreamt of outside our ideologies of power and theories of historicity."[170] In fact, there exist certain opponents who argue for the return of studies that focus on the "life of the mind" because of an aversion to politics and theory which, nevertheless, represents a political position on the subject.

For example, English professor James Soderholm believes that the postmodern popularity of what he calls a "negative hermeneutics" finds its motivation in a corrosive process aimed at the demystification of texts to attack the illusion of "false consciousness"[171] in a fundamental critique of modernity that succeeds only in causing "adversarial paranoia among the professoriate which, in turn, leads to an infection of the graduate student population with discourses that degenerate into rote sociology."[172] Paradoxically, Soderholm's reaction to postmodernity and cultural studies analyses is not unlike opposing theorists who also view categories of the aesthetic as either largely

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[170] James Soderholm, "Introduction," in *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in an Age of Cultural Studies* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1997), p. 2.
[171] False consciousness as a method of critiquing modern culture was anchored in the theoretical works of, namely, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud to reflect class struggle, resentment of the weak against the strong, and human desire, respectively (Ibid.).
[172] Ibid., pp. 2-20.

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illusory, or, in the words of scholar Rasheed Araeen, "otherwise inadequate and inappropriate for understanding the predicament of an artistic discourse whose main objective is a historical responsibility to function subversively in the challenging of art institutions and their structures."[173] These similar opinions held by politically complementary scholars evidence the prominent debate centered within postmodernism, which concerns what role politics has in theory and vice versa. Furthermore, the debate is defined by basic principles that make certain these two ways of thinking about language are sufficiently irreconcilable because aesthetic evaluations often oscillate between intrinsic analysis and extrinsic cultural critiques of various formalisms.[174] In a word, it suggests a clash known as the "Culture Wars" which, according to Eagleton, has "pitched battles between populists and elitists, custodians of the canon and devotees of *difference*, dead white males and the unjustly marginalized."[175]

In a compelling essay that situates the debate in art historical terms, cultural critic David Levi Strauss demonstrates why the body—as a last refuge of the subjective—has increasingly become a site for social, sexual, and political conflicts.[176] By examining the practices of contemporary artist's variously transforming and defending works that deal with body images, Strauss articulates the curious histories of two terms, namely, aesthetics and anaesthetics, through their etymological roots.[177] According to Strauss, the

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[173] Rasheed Araeen, "A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics," in Araeen, Cubitt, and Sardar, eds., *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture, and Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 333-345.
[174] Soderholm, op cit., p. 3.
[175] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) p. 51.
[176] David Levi Strauss, "Aesthetics & Anaesthetics," in *Between Dog & Wolf: Essays on Art and Politics in the Twilight of the Millennium* (New York: Autonomedia, 1999), p. 7.
[177] Ibid.

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positive and negative turns of these Greek words for perception have converged in the present to reveal complexities inherent to postmodernist evaluations of contemporary art. He relates the terms to the modern period, or nineteenth century, in European history when both terms came of age concomitantly with Romanticism reigning hand-in-hand with the revolutionary use of anaesthetics such as ether, opium, and cocaine in areas relevant to medical science. In keeping with that reference, Strauss intimates that just as the medical field has become increasingly incapable of understanding or treating chronic pain, so has much recent art theory and criticism been unable to account for aesthetic pleasure (or pain) and has either tried to avoid the issue entirely or to subsume the aesthetic into some other discourse.[178] Therefore, this quandary acquires expression from an anaesthetic logic that defines pleasure as the absence of pain and so compels scholars, on both the Left and Right, to configure a discourse that averts socially and politically informed types of art (and artists) away from the realm of aesthetic experience to remain in a type of equilibrium.[179]

As a result, Strauss' analogy follows, insomuch as the medical field exploited the use of anaesthetics in the late nineteenth century to rob pain of all meaning, so, too, have some cultural critics and art historians favored a similar remedy when challenged with

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[178] Strauss is referring to Hal Foster's essay in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. xv, when Foster questioned whether or not "categories afforded by the aesthetic" were still valid and posited that "the notion of the aesthetic as subversive," as left over from modernist criticism, "was now largely illusory." Strauss also cites Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 205, whose discussion of the aesthetic he finds to be an unrecoverable anachronism like the author, the subject, and the documentary photograph. His opinion of the aesthetic is often echoed by other scholars, too, both Left and Right.

[179] Strauss argues that both Left and Right commentators support an anaesthetic position to promote types of art that resist stimulation and change. The conservative Right does so by defending their notion of culture from change whereas the academic determinist Left believes that the only proper role of art is to convey political messages, or to treat social ills directly and unequivocally. From this perspective, non-instrumental aesthetic imagery is seen as just another opiate of the people (Strauss, op cit., pp. 10-11).

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works of art whose meanings are problematized, analyzed, and theorized from a position extrinsic to European, or "Western," systems of representation. Most explicitly, this type of anaesthetic logic is exercised by a neoconservative element (in a postmodernism of reaction) that views the proper role of art to function as social lubricant and analgesic; to "stimulate buying and anaesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex."[180] Nevertheless, this study has also suggested that those on the Left, who often plea for a return to the more radical practice of aesthetic inquiry (to reveal root causes of pain by tracing its source in order to consign new meanings),[181] are neither exempt, nor blameless, in contributing to the institutionalization[182] of criticisms that are established, confounded, and reified by an attachment to issues of identity in the hopes of inclusion.[183] After all, the imperative of a postmodern critique is, according to Foster, the surrendering of privileged, aesthetic realms for a destructuring of the order of representations in an effort to reinscribe artistic practices as *transformed* within a historical framework.[184] Similarly, for Araeen, the answer lies in looking beyond postcolonial cultural theory to the formation of radically new ideas, new strategies, and new discourses, not only to produce art but to also recognize and legitimize it.[185]

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[180] Strauss, op cit., p. 10, quoting Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), p. 178.
[181] Strauss, op cit., p. 12.
[182] This predicament best described by Araeen: "The apparent rhetoric of many postcolonial intellectuals may be against the system, and they are good at producing very complicated texts, but in reality they want to be part of the system...postcolonial cultural theory *per se* (emphasis his) is not tyrannical; the tyranny is located in some of its ideals, which have very little to do with the specificity of art and have now been appropriated by institutions which use them to reinforce their colonial idea of the Other (Araeen, op cit., p. 340)."
[183] The issue of inclusion is here inextricably tied to ideas of nationalism, in the form of narratives, to structure, assimilate, or exclude one or another version of history.
[184] Foster, op cit., p. xii.
[185] Araeen, op cit., p. 344.

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Despite their differences, both Soderholm and Araeen still share an urgency to transform aesthetic analyses and postmodern discourse.[186] In fact, their motivations to go beyond the limits of what the present time has to offer finds its roots in the Enlightenment and is characterized, according to Michel Foucault, as a "philosophical ethos" that describes the permanent critique of our historical era.[187] This type of philosophical interrogation connects us all to the Enlightenment, [188] not through doctrinal elements, but rather, through how it constitutes a permanent reactivation of an "attitude of modernity," or a mode of relating to contemporary reality and its limits. Instead of viewing modernity[189] simply as a period of history, or an epoch in the sequel of history (as if to distinguish the "modern era" from the "postmodern era"), Foucault envisages a more useful process to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of counter-modernity. That process entails transforming the critique, previously conducted in the form of a necessary limitation, into

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[186] This polarization echoes the divide between Left and Right thinking, where each scholar contends with historical encounters between theory and literature (Soderholm) and theory and art (Araeen) and the extent to which social, political, and cultural issues are integrated to inform their views.

[187] Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 42.

[188] Foucault's essay stems from a study of Kant's "*Was ist Aufkläring?*" (1784). Kant defines the question of Enlightenment as an "exit" or "way out," thus raising the philosophical question of the present day. Kant was not seeking to understand the present on the basis of a totality or future achievement but was dealing with the question of contemporary reality alone as an ongoing process. The significance of Kant's work, with respect to knowledge, is located at a crossroads where critical reflection and reflection on history simultaneously situates a person with respect to the overall movement as well as marks a relation of belonging and responsibility for each individual within that process. As the point of departure from Kant's text, Foucault outlines the "attitude of modernity" and elaborates on a type of historico-critical inquiry that reflects upon our limits in order to transgress them (Ibid., pp. 32-50).

[189] There are numerous definitions of modernity but I am writing in reference to Foucault's essay. His discussion of modernity is specifically tied to Baudelaire's own definition of it, in the nineteenth century, as "ephemeral, fleeting, and contingent." According to Foucault, Baudelaire thought being modern meant adopting an attitude consistent with recapturing something eternal that was not beyond the present instant, nor behind it, but within it. This attitude made it possible for artists to grasp the heroic aspect of the present moment through the difficult interplay between the truth of what was real and the exercise of freedom (Ibid., pp. 39-42).

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a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression through a historical analysis appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves.[190] Foucault's method focuses on a mode of reflective relation to the present that simultaneously problematizes our relation to the present, our historical mode of being, as well as the constitution of the "self" as autonomous subject.[191] The usefulness of this approach lies in its focus on historical investigations into the events that constitute what we have become while foregoing universal structures embedded with moral themes and value judgments. Furthermore, this type of criticism functions by sufficiently opening up the realm of historical inquiry to marginalized peoples and puts itself to the test of contemporary reality in order to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.[192]

Indeed, this type of criticism consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits that have historically been imposed on us. However, even though both Soderholm and Araeen share the desire to transgress present limits in their respective fields, Araeen is not interested in searching for formal structures with universal value[193] but, instead, seeks to establish an alternative discourse that is subversive to institutional ideologies and their structures. In fact, the challenge that Araeen poses represents a divergent issue not often explored by most mainstream postmodern theorists who actively separate "Western"

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[190] Ibid., pp. 45-46.
[191] Ibid., p. 42.
[192] Ibid., p. 46.
[193] In his essay "Critical History of Art, or Transfiguration of Values?," *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Spring, 1972, p. 462, scholar Kurt W. Forster explains that the main reason for the separation of art from history is mostly ideological when scholars like Soderholm practice a formalist view on art objects. Specifically, those scholars treat history as garnish to supplement their direct experience of artifacts and do not realize that "a universalized significance that outstrips the limitations of space and time cannot stand outside history, but is in fact definable only within it. It is perforce *historical* significance."

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postmodernism from the non-European world, as well as the consequences of European modernism (and modernization) in the colonized world.[194] For example, in a critique of Jean-François Lyotard's thesis on why the two great narratives of emancipation and enlightenment lost their legitimizing power in the "Western" world, scholar Edward Said re-situates those postmodern transformations within an imperial dynamic to illustrate how Lyotard's arguments, in fact, stand free of history by not considering other reasons why power might have abated. [195]

In contrast to Lyotard's thesis, Said contends that "the West lost their legitimation in large measure as a result of the crisis of modernism, which foundered on or was frozen in contemplative irony for various reasons, of which one was the disturbing appearance in Europe of various Others, whose provenance was the imperial domain."[196] To illustrate this fundamental historical problem of European modernism, Said makes an allusion to the disparities inherent to Camus and Fanon both writing about Algeria.[197] What becomes significant in the comparison is the role that representation takes, not just as an academic or theoretical quandary, but as political choice. In that sense, the anti-imperialist challenge that Araeen, and others, pose reveals how both modern and postmodern methodological features can be interrogated by categories of representation,

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[194] Edward W. Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter, 1989, p. 222.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid. Said points out that the Arabs in *La Peste* (1947) and *L'Etranger* (1942), both by Albert Camus, are nameless beings used as background for the portentous European metaphysics explored by the author. In stark contrast, Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961) forces on Europe an emerging counternarrative, the process of liberation and decolonization.

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and its exigencies, so that a new impetus can be realized for peoples whose histories have been silenced or ignored.

By analyzing and reflecting on the limits that have historically been imposed upon Native artists, authors have shown how the politics of difference have been woven into the field of art history and, subsequently, manifested in writings that concern themselves with visual art made by contemporary Native American artists. In fact, for artists of color, in particular, and other marginalized groups, in general, the discourse that interprets the aesthetic merit of artworks is predominantly framed by the politics of identity and its relation to difference, with elements of power often defining the outcome. In the present study, the various processes Native artists are employing to locate themselves in a contemporary context, as participants in the permanent critique of the present, correlated with an exploration of mainstream theoretical accounts that have historically dislocated Native artists to the margins of the art world. To relate this situation to a more recent study that utilizes a political perspective to explore the relational and constructed character of identity, the work of William E. Connolly will be used to trace the problem of identity and difference for the ideological structures that function in the U.S. as an idealization of politics. By operating from a standpoint that recognizes the interdependency of identity\difference, Connolly relates human definitions of the theological problem of evil that provide "blowups, as it were, of issues woven into the solidification of human identities."[198]

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[198] William E. Connolly, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 2. According to Connelly, monolithic conceptions of identity and difference, historically authorized by monotheism, locate responsibility for suffering in ways that, first,

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In Connolly's philosophical study, the paradox of identity resides in the theological determination of divine identity, in the first problem of evil, as it turns upon human efforts to save the benevolence of an omnipotent god by exempting that god from responsibility for the general experiences of evil that exist in the world. Within the framework of theism, this experience shifts paradigmatically from the question of "how?" to "why?" human suffering exists and, therefore, becomes bound up with the issue of responsibility which exerts pressure to find agents responsible for the forms of suffering most abhorred.[199] Transposed to a political level, these same issues arise when attempts to protect the purity and certainty of a hegemonic identity require defining as independent sites of evil those differences that pose the greatest threat to the integrity and certainty of that one particular identity.

More importantly, finding solutions to the first problem of evil shapes and defines the second problem as "diverse political tactics through which doubts about self-identity are posed and resolved by the constitution of an 'Other' against which that identity may define itself."[200] In that instance, the second problem reterritorializes the first problem by signaling the institutionalization of reassuring assumptions about self-identity that reside within human structures of personal identity and social order by the consolidation of identity through the constitution of difference as "otherness."[201] Identities that exceed or

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create a new problem of evil and, second, conceal the terms of that new relocation.

[199] It is that shift from "how" to "why" evil exists "that the primordial experience of suffering in life falls out of the category of 'evil' and is reduced a smaller class of cases to which the question of responsibility is pertinent. (Ibid., p. 1). Furthermore, "to come to terms with one's implication in these strategies, one needs to examine established tactics of self-identity, not so much by engaging in self-inquiry into one's deep interior as by exploring the means by which one has become constituted as what one is" (Ibid., p. 9).

[200] Connelly, op cit., p. x.

[201] Ibid., p. 3.

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deviate from those structures are confounded by exclusionary terms, with no regard for contingent, and often ambiguous, aspects of personhood. Even though Connolly makes clear that it is impossible to be human without some sort of implication in a particular identity, a paradox of ethicality emerges that is located at the heart of the matter—that is, a "Western," theological, metaphysical tradition that interprets identity\difference through the constitution of good and evil.[202]

[202] Ibid., p. 15. Connolly draws upon Nietzche's *Genealogy of Morals: An Attack,* originally published 1887, which addresses problems such as the conflict between moral versus aesthetic approaches to life, the effect of Christianity on human values and other ideas.

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